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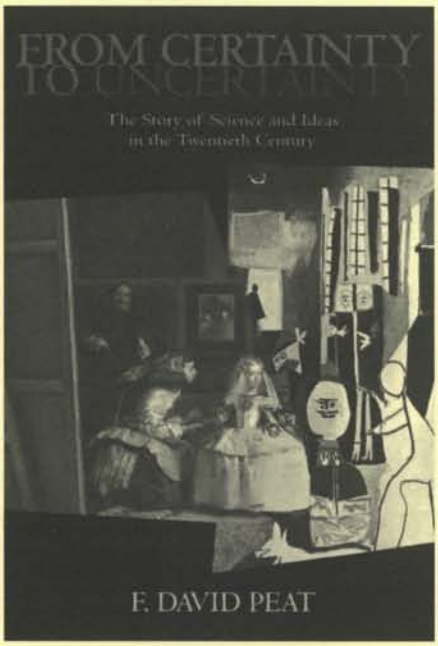

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F. David Peat was engaged in research in theoretical physics at the National Research Council of Canada for many years and had ongoing discussions on the foundations of physics with the late David Bohm. In 1996, Peat moved to the medieval village of Pari, Italy, where he created the Pari Center for New Learning, where people can explore the new paradigms created by science and think about society's meanings and values.

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Life is our dictionary.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The World's Eye

In the summer of 1837, in his "American Scholar" oration, Ralph Waldo Emerson exhorted his listeners to free themselves from European culture and to look instead to their own country. "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close," he declared. "The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests."

When Emerson spoke those words, his nation was only six decades old, and Europe was still the intellectual axis on which the world turned. Today the United States stands in a different position; its greatest danger lies in looking outward not too much but too little. If Emerson—who was anything but parochial—were alive today, I wouldn't be surprised if he redefined his ideal American Scholar as a curious citizen whose gaze roams the globe.

We planned this issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR with that idea in mind. Nearly everything here—all the articles, all the poems, most of the departments—takes place somewhere other than the United States: Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Niger, South Africa, Sweden, Russia, and Vietnam. In some cases, the location is secondary ("Fever and Flame" is set in Cape Town, where J. M. Coetzee grew up, but most of the action unfolds inside the author's head); in others, it colors every sentence (every time I read Peter Chilson's "The Road from Abalak," about a journey through West Africa, I taste dust).

Though most of the authors in this issue are American—including Francine du Plessix Gray and Andrew X. Pham, who emigrated here as children, each a refugee from a different war—some live elsewhere. We had to be mindful of time zones whenever we called Richard Gilman and Kevin Simmonds in Japan; Egon Lass in Jerusalem; Michael Blumenthal in Marseilles; John Ray in Cambridge, England; or Mario Vargas Llosa in too many places to count (he has homes in London, Paris, Madrid, and Lima and travels frequently). My favorite address belongs to Tim Severin: Inchy Bridge, County Cork, Ireland.

Emerson's oration—after which this magazine is named—celebrated the thinker who becomes "the world's eye" by plying "the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation." Few of the observers who contributed to this issue are hasty writers, and, given the size of our honoraria, "unpaid" isn't too far off the mark; but they are not "unhonored." We thank these writers for enlarging our field of vision.

A. F.

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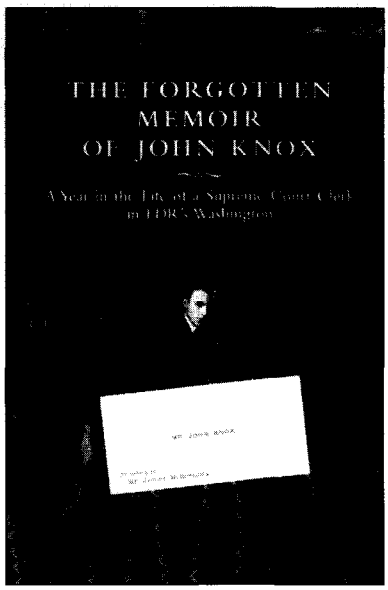

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

The Debacle

FRANCINE DU PLESSIX GRAY

As my mother and I left Paris on the gloriously sunny morning of June 10, 1940, four days before the Germans took the city, we became part of a panic-stricken caravan whose surreal mayhem still haunts me. The road to Tours, the destination of most Parisians (and also of the French government, which decamped for Tours that very day) was clogged with every possible invention that could move on wheels. Amid a cacophonous din of bleating horns, fire trucks, ambulances, ice-cream vendors' vehicles, funeral carriages, municipal street-sweeping trucks, tourist buses racily labeled "Paris La Nuit," even wheelbarrows and prams mingled with the chic limousines, sports cars, and family sedans that were all heading south toward the Loire, where, so deluded gossip had it, French troops might still "reconstitute a front." Barely moving at the pace of a human stride—it was taking three days to travel a distance usually covered in three hours—these vehicles, crammed with children, women of all ages, old men, and boys under the age of eighteen, were surmounted by an astounding variety of hastily assembled personal possessions. Tied onto their roofs, amid mounds of sheets, blankets and mattresses, there were birdcages, bicycles, cradles, sewing machines, saucepans and other cooking utensils, collapsible tents, cuckoo clocks. Swarming amid the vehicles, at times totally stopping their advance, large bands of haggard, desperate-eyed soldiers in search of their retreating units stumbled alongside hordes of pedestrian refugees who carried their possessions on their backs: a portion of the millions of citizens who had taken to the roads, in the past four weeks, in the wake of one of the most catastrophic defeats in military history.

Beginning its onslaught on May 10, in a mere two days the German army had pierced the rugged Ardennes region and crossed the Meuse River, terrains that France's tragically incompetent High Command had thought impregnable to the German panzer divisions. In the ensuing fortnight they had swept through Holland and Belgium, forcing the capitulation of both countries, and bolted across France's Département du Nord, necessitating the heroic evacuation, at Dunkirk, of more than 330,000 Allied troops. At the end of May, German forces had obliged the French Army to reconstitute its front at the Somme River, a two-hour drive north of Paris. And on June 6, they had broken through that last defense line, causing such panic among French troops that generals, their originally scheduled maneuvers made impossible by the tide of civilians clogging the country's roads, ceased to accept commands from the General Staff, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers of all ranks abandoned their regiments to seek refuge in their homes throughout France. Now, on June 10, the day my mother and I left Paris, German forces were speedily approaching the capital, having overwhelmed what had only recently been considered Continental Europe's most powerful army.

No wonder that the word used ever since for this tragic sequence of events and Marshal Pé-

Francine du Plessix Gray was born in Warsaw of French and Russian parents, and emigrated from France to the United States during the Second World War. Her books include *Lovers and Tyrants, At Home with the Marquis de Sade,* and *Simone Weil.* She writes the "At Large and At Small" column each summer.

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tain's ensuing armistice—*débâcle*—does not mean merely "defeat." Its overtones of shame, of communal failure, of widespread social disintegration, were recorded in the faces of the civilians and soldiers who crowded the tragic caravan my mother and I had joined. This torrent of humanity registered no ill will and little rage, simply a shared despair and a benumbed stupor. Few members of that exodus knew where their relatives were. It was as if a monstrous explosion had blown hundreds of thousands of families into fragments, scattering them all over the landscape, causing the ones left behind to phone every possible hostelry in the country and place ads in papers ("Jules Monnet, your loving parents are in Auxerre").

As our tiny Peugeot wheezed and spluttered southward in the bumper-to-bumper traffic, we knew that throughout France hundreds of thousands of our compatriots were searching for loved ones, and wondering about their survival, with an anxiety equal to ours.

I imagine that most of us can cite a particular historical event—Pearl Harbor, D-Day, the assassination of John Kennedy, 9/11—that we look on as a defining moment, the specific encounter of self and world that became the cradle of our historical consciousness. That event, for me, was the fall of France. I was nine years old in June 1940, but this milestone drew a curtain on my innocence; made me unable, from that time on, to have any sense of identity not linked to some precise historical context; stamped me with a dual sense of uprootedness and engagement.

Throughout that summer of 1940, there were numerous personal factors that intensified my sense of deracination. Upon leaving Paris, I had been separated from the two women who had been my principal mentors since my infancy: my governess and my beloved Russian great-aunt, both of whom had chosen to stay behind. I worried despairingly about the idol of my childhood, my father, an officer in the air force who was somewhere in France, looking for his disintegrated squadron and grieving over his American mistress's enforced return to the United States. I sensed that the elegant blond beauty sitting at the wheel of our little Peugeot, my mother, was desperate for news of her own lover, who had left Paris for the South a few days earlier—as a Russian Jew with a Nansen passport, he was particularly vulnerable to persecution. Moreover, my mother had only recently learned to drive and was totally confounded by the clutch. As we sputtered toward Tours at the rate of five kilometers an hour, the engine constantly stalling, I was aware that, notwithstanding the kisses she kept blowing me to boost my spirits, she was very worried about whether we'd make it to Tours ahead of the Nazis. So, to cheer her up, I kept humming a ditty that had been the rage since the war's outbreak, and that has summed up to me, ever since, the delusions the entire nation had been steeped in. It went: "Nous allons pendre notre linge sur la ligne Siegfried . . . Si la ligne Siegfried est encore là" (We're going to hang our linen on the Siegfried line . . . If the Siegfried line is still there).

Most of those whose lives have been transformed by a historical crisis are impelled to return, at some point, to the site where the crisis occurred. The doughty octogenarians who flocked to Normandy Beach on the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, the millions of Americans who have visited Pearl Harbor, the millions who will visit Ground Zero, testify to our perennial need to attune memory to the concrete reality of place. But in the case of the fall of France, which manifested itself in dispersion and dislocation, a return to those sites in which the tragedy was experienced may not be enough. Unlike the Normandy Beach landing or 9/11, the debacle of 1940 was a process rather than an event, a phenomenon whose nature was as psychological as it was physical. Rather than a visit to a material site, it calls for a patient, diligent examination of the historical givens that led to the tragedy. This is what I've recently attempted to engage in as I reflected on the role played by my parents' and grandparents' generations—France's intellectual and military elite—in the most agonizing defeat of their nation's history.

The first step in such a process of reflection, I soon realized, is to recognize how

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deeply the tragedies of World War I influenced France's attitude toward the events of 1939. Beyond its reckless wasting of a million and a half French lives—a sizable portion of the nation's young male population—World War I was a conflict that France won by a very small margin, through one freakish reversal of fortunes that occurred at the Marne in 1918. Yet it created a massive network of delusions about France's role in the world, as well as a determination to avoid another war at all costs, to preserve "peace at any price." Few writers of the "Entre Deux Guerres" period expressed these convictions better than the novelist and essayist Maurice Sachs in his memoir of the 1920s and 1930s, *Le Sabbath:*

> The War of 1914 was a crisis deeper than any of those that France had lived through since 1789. Neither 18 Brumaire, nor the Empire, nor Waterloo, nor the return of the royalty . . . nor the Second Republic, nor the Second Empire, nor Sedan, nor the Commune, nor the birth of the Third Republic shook France as profoundly, to the depths of its entrails, as the war of 1914 and the peace that followed. . . . The peace of 1919 announced an eternal peace. . . . The French, charmed by delicious illusions, were the first to think that this peace (which . . . differed from others only by the demented hopes it created) once more marked the Fatherland for a unique destiny: . . . All excesses, all licenses, all follies became authorized, crowned as they were by the charming attributes of victory.

As crucial to any discussion of the 1940 debacle as these delusions of "eternal peace" is the hardware versus software debate: How much blame should be placed on the inferiority of France's material weapons? Or should one principally fault the nation's psychological and cerebral equipment—the attitudes and tactical intellect of its general staff? Of the many historical works that have focused on the fall of France, the most memorable is *Strange Defeat* by Marc Bloch, the leading historian of his generation, who wrote it in a blaze of anger in the summer of 1940, immediately after being demobilized after the fall of France. He later became a legendary Resistance leader and was captured, tortured, and shot by the Nazis in 1944, shortly after the Allies landed in Normandy.

It has become a truism to say that the French were defeated because they continued to wage the same "war of the trenches" they had waged in World War I. Exploring that very issue, Bloch, a decorated veteran of the 1914 conflict who served as a captain in army intelligence in World War II, proves how deeply intertwined the issues of software and hardware can be. He asserts that the archaic tactics of the nation's military leaders—General Maurice Gamelin's response to the German onslaught proved so patently inept that he was replaced within a fortnight by seventy-three-year-old General Maxime Weygand—was caused by the fact that they were still "soaked . . . to the very marrow of their bones" with memories of their 1918 victory.

Like Marshal Philippe Pétain, who would become head of state the following month, Gamelin and Weygand were, in Bloch's view, "ancient fossils . . . trailing clouds of former glory" who suffered from such "moral and intellectual sclerosis" that they could not begin to grasp the new metaphysics of time and distance implicit in the German Blitzkrieg. The term means "lightning war," and it denoted a revolutionary blend of three assault forces: 1) a spearhead of panzer divisions, powerful tanks supported by large contingents of motorized infantry and motorcycle troops that buzzed like wasps about the armored columns; 2) the well-protected infantry divisions, which followed a few miles behind; and 3) the Luftwaffe, which softened up the enemy shortly before the panzer charge with several kinds of planes, including the Stuka dive-bomber, whose horrendous whistling sound, according to Bloch, contributed greatly to the demoralization of French forces, and the Me 109 fighter, one of the fastest airborne vehicles in existence.

Bloch was the first of many historians who have pointed out the deficiency of French weaponry—both the intellectual and material kinds—in confronting these highly sophisticated German tactics. In contrast to the

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streamlined Luftwaffe, France's air power was notably weak. Its intelligence services were rendered pathetically inefficient by bureaucratic bumbling and overcentralization. The members of its High Command were notorious Anglophobes, ill suited to collaborate efficiently with their allies. French tanks were as powerful as German tanks; but they were less mobile, and far less strategically positioned. The High Command, heedless of the warnings of a few *frondeur* officers—including an obscure colonel named Charles de Gaulle, who as early as 1933 had published an article predicting that the next war would be based on tank power—had completely discounted their effectiveness as attack weapons. (De Gaulle's work, in contrast, was read by many German military leaders).

Instead of focusing on tank warfare, the French High Command had put most of its energy and faith into the obsolete concrete of the Maginot Line, a fortification made all the more irrelevant by the fact that it did not extend beyond the Belgian frontier, which is precisely where the Germans launched their flanking attack. Bloch points out that the French generals' most mind-boggling mistake was to overlook the lessons learned in the Polish campaign of September 1939, when the Germans' tank-based onslaught had swept through the country in a mere fortnight. Gamelin argued that the panzer divisions' conquest of the Polish plains would be unthinkable in the hilly, densely forested Ardennes, which, he alleged, tanks could not cross. He was proved disastrously wrong when those hills offered the panzer divisions all the more protection.

As Bloch put it, "it is as if the two opposing forces belonged . . . to entirely different epochs of human history." The French High Command was a group of men who "in a century of chemists had retained the outlook of alchemists." France was waging "a war of old men . . . bogged down by errors engendered by the faulty teaching of history. It was saturated by the smell of decay rising from the Staff College . . . the offices of the General Staff, and the barrack-square." Bloch's comments on the decay of the barrack square, alas, constitute the saddest segment of his remarkable book, for they highlight the roles that various ideological segments of the French citizenry played in the debacle of 1940. The right wing's hysterical dread of Bolshevism had led it to look on Germany as the last bastion of defense against the Soviet Union. The strong pacifist streak that developed in France's left wing directly after World War I—Socialist deputy Pierre Laval would be an outstanding example—led many citizens to believe that wars are waged for the interest of the rich and powerful, and that France would save itself a great deal of suffering by opening its gates to the enemy: an argument that, as Bloch puts it, "worked unconsciously to produce a nation of cowards."

Throughout the 1930s, a pervasive disenchantment with the French political system led others to the dubious consolation that beneath the ruins of France a shameful regime would be crushed to death; that defeat would be, as one observer put it, "a punishment meted out by Destiny to a guilty nation." (Simone Weil believed this for years.) Bloch's bitter conclusions about the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the French military elite have never, to my knowledge, been challenged. As Tony Judt, a distinguished historian of twentieth-century France, has recently written: "All subsequent commentators on 1940, including Ernest May, the most recent historian of the battle . . . describe their own efforts as a mere footnote or amendment to [Bloch's] penetrating analysis . . . a rotting, divided polity collapsed unprotesting when its incompetent military caste caved in before a magnificent war machine."

The Nazis caught up with us in mid-June, a few days after my mother and I had arrived in the Touraine at the end of a harrowing three-day trip. We had slept in the car, living on the reserves of bread, water, and hard-boiled eggs we had brought from Paris, supplemented by occasional scraps of fruit we scrounged in local cafés. The Touraine was where my father had bidden us to go if Paris fell; he had been an early convert to de Gaulle's theories of tank warfare, and his

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acerbic disenchantment with the French High Command had led him to predict the debacle since the beginning of the war. My mother, who, notwithstanding their marital difficulties, greatly trusted my father's wisdom, had abided by his wishes. We had sought refuge at Villandry, a Renaissance château graced with one of France's loveliest gardens. It belonged to a friend of my mother's, Isabelle Carvallo de la Bouillerie, a woman of considerable mettle and generosity who had recently turned her residence into a guest house for acquaintances seeking shelter in the region.

Our room at Villandry was at the end of one of the two main wings of the U-shaped château, and looked out, on the left, to its celebrated boxwood gardens. Straight ahead we could see the little country road that linked the village of Villandry to Tours. Soon after our arrival from Paris, on June 18—it was a very sunny morning, I remember that entire tragic month as being drenched in sunlight—we woke before seven to the sound of powerful young voices singing. My mother leapt out of bed, exclaiming, "Les Boches sont arrivés!" She grabbed my hand as she ran to the window, and we looked down upon a German regiment's first parade on their newly conquered terrain: goose-stepping smartly, four abreast, a few hundred yards from our window, fresh-faced, very young, their heads held high toward us, their helmets and bayonets blazing in the sun. If my memory serves me right, their marching song that day was "Lili Marlene":

> Vor der Kaserne, vor dem grossen Tor
> stand eine Laterne, und steht sie noch davor . . .

As children, I suspect, we are all born collaborationists; we do everything in our power to enchant and charm the enemy, to save our skins, to survive. I thrilled to the radiance of the young Germans' stern faces with an enjoyment I knew to be infamous. I wanted to kill them, yet I felt a child's admiration for anything sleek, streamlined, powerful. My crass little soul delighted in the pomp of uniforms, in all appurtenances of rank and might. I thought back with pity and rage to the haggard, desperate French soldiers we had seen on the road out of Paris. I stared hard at the Nazis, trying to summon up hatred, feeling disloyal to my father (who might at any moment, wherever he was, be killed by one of them) for admiring their beauty, their futurity. I know my mother felt no such ambivalence. She stood defiantly at the window, her hands on her hips, as if confronting someone in a brawl, and quietly whispered, loathing in her voice, "Quelle merde."

Throughout that week we had kept up with events on the château's wireless, some twenty of us gathering nightly in the living room to hear the calamitous news. On June 16, Premier Paul Reynaud had resigned after his cabinet voted down Churchill's extraordinary offer to fuse the British and French nations into a single temporary union. Marshal Pétain was named head of state in his stead. And on June 17—this time we were bidden to gather in the living room earlier than usual, at twelve noon—we heard the eighty-four-year-old leader announce the end of the war in his quivering, curiously high-pitched voice: "I make to France the gift of my person to allay its misery. . . . It is with a heavy heart that I tell you today to cease all combat."

As for reports of de Gaulle's appeal of June 18, which was broadcast by the BBC and heard by only a very small minority of citizens, these reached us in the following days. I remember our hostess, Madame de la Bouillerie, rushing into our room to give us the news. General Charles de Gaulle, she announced, was calling on all French to join him in London and to continue the struggle against Germany! Upon hearing this—I suspect it was around June 19 or 20—my mother grew very quiet. She waited until we were alone, took my hand, and whispered excitedly, "I suspect that your father will at any moment join him, join de Gaulle!" She was absolutely right.

Shortly thereafter, perhaps a fortnight into the Occupation, my mother and I had our first face-to-face encounter with the Nazi regime. We had driven in our little Peugeot to Tours to renew my mother's driving permit. A

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few blocks from the Préfecture, where the Germans had established their Kommandantur, our tiny car collided with a huge Mercedes three times the size and weight of our vehicle, filled with German officers. Glass from the windshield shattered on our foreheads, hitting particularly hard on the passenger side, and my memories of the next few minutes are drenched in blood. Although my mother's terrible driving may have been to blame, she bounded out of the car, seething with rage, and in her limited German accused the officers of causing the accident. The officers may have been taken aback by her vehemence—these were the days when docility was counseled upon any encounter with the occupying forces—but she was gorgeous and distinguished-looking enough to keep them temporarily at bay, and they limited themselves to asking for our identity papers. She whipped them out, along with her visiting card. Seeing the title "Vicomtesse" engraved on the card, the officers, apparently sensitive to issues of social hierarchy, offered to take us to the hospital. "Not at all," my mother demanded, "I want to see the Kommandant." Startled but bowing, they acceded. Our Peugeot was still drivable, and we followed the Germans' Mercedes, amid a blaze of Klaxons, to the Kommandantur.

My mother was a shrewd and cunning woman. And I suspect that for the past few weeks, ever since the Armistice had divided France into an Occupied Zone and a so-called Free Zone, she had been wondering how to obtain an Ausweis, a permit, to get us to the Free Zone. What luck! she had immediately thought when the accident occurred. She could finally meet the Kommandant of Tours! I was a brave child who had survived some serious illnesses, and as our car reached our destination, she lovingly commended me for my calm as she wiped blood from my face and combed my hair for our important visit.

We were ushered into the main office, where a French Préfet had reigned until a few weeks before. The Kommandant was a tall, courtly, scholarly-looking man in his late thirties, with horn-rimmed glasses and a handsome mustache. The Kommandant perused our identity papers and then asked, in accent-free French, "Is your husband by any chance descended from the Cardinal de Richelieu?"

"Anyone in his right mind," my mother answered snappily, "would rather be descended from La Dame aux Camélias." (Cardinal de Richelieu's full name was Armand-Jean du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu. The courtesan who is the heroine of Dumas's novel, on which Verdi's opera *La Traviata* is based, is called Camille Duplessis.)

The Kommandant gave a broad, enchanted smile, and called his orderlies to come dress my wounds. As I was being tended to, he held a lively discussion with my mother concerning the relative merits of Dumas *père* and Dumas *fils*. We learned that Kommandant Hebert had been a professor of French literature at the University of Heidelberg. A box of chocolates was offered us, a car was called for to take us home to Villandry. "Schön Kleine Kontessen," he whispered as he kissed my hand in parting. I'll never forget the graze of his mustache on my wrist, the very great kindness—an almost pleading kindness—of his eyes, my deepening confusion about whether it was permissible to like a highly placed member of the armed forces that were my father's enemy.

Kommandant Hebert's kindness was revealed to us once more in an episode that I did not witness, but that I heard my mother relate many times in later years. In July, barely ten days after our first meeting with the Kommandant, my mother had been called down to the Ministry of War at Vichy, where she was given the news of my father's death. Just as she had predicted, he had set out to join de Gaulle the very day after the general's radio appeal (the loving letter he wrote us telling us of his decision would not reach us for some months). He had flown to Casablanca and organized the first squadron of the Free French Air Force. He was shot down over the Mediterranean on his very first mission, and became one of the first five Frenchmen to be decorated with de Gaulle's

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highest honor, the Croix de la Libération. (Over the following years, some 850 men would be so honored, many of them, like my father, posthumously.) I was not told of my father's death until a year later.

A fortnight or so after my mother received the news, she received a message from Kommandant Hebert asking her to visit him in his office, alone. The way she related it years later, he sat her down courteously in an armchair, and said words to this effect: "I hear from our intelligence reports that your husband was shot down over the Mediterranean. There may be problems. You and your child might be safer in the Free Zone." And he offered her an Ausweis, the very document she had been gathering the courage to ask him for. They parted on the best of terms.

A week later we were back in our little Peugeot, sputtering and stalling every few minutes—my mother never did learn to work a clutch properly—toward the Free Zone and the South of France. My mother's lover—my stepfather-to-be—had safely reached his villa there at the end of June, and was anxiously awaiting us. Six months later, the three of us sailed together from Lisbon to New York on a tiny storm-tossed vessel that had never gone farther than the Azores and was making a three-week virgin voyage across the Atlantic. Another banal tale of survival, another instance of Destiny being kind.

One of the many maxims I was exposed to during my youth in France—the French love a good abstraction, since it enables them to create yet another aphorism—goes this way: "The British are beastly toward the peoples they colonize, and utterly decent to each other, whereas the French can be relatively democratic colonizers, and are beastly toward each other." I tend to trust the wisdom of that adage, at least in regard to the distaste the French have for their compatriots.

Few books on the debacle of 1940 have been as eloquent on that very issue as Emmanuel Berl's *La Fin de la IIIe République.* This account, published in the late 1960s, offers a sweeping indictment of the shameful scapegoating, masterminded by the Vichy regime,

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that went on after the fall of France, and of the deep-seated internecine hatreds it revealed. Berl, a French Jew, writes as a onetime insider, for he briefly served as one of Pétain's speechwriters before having a radical change of heart and seeking refuge in southern France. He points out that among the military leaders who headed Pétain's government, there was a code of honor that mandated covering up any mistakes made by the French army. So every possible segment of the French community except the military was held accountable for the debacle of 1940. According to Vichy's propaganda machine, the war was lost because the citizens were too hedonistic; because they were not fertile enough; because French workers, deluded by the left-wing unions, had not fabricated enough weapons; because liberty, equality, and fraternity had been exalted at the price of honor and Fatherland; because France's allies (perfidious Albion again!) let her down; and, above all, because of the Popular Front, led by the Jew Léon Blum, who gave the rabble paid vacations and the forty-hour week. Weygand, who at one point wanted to declare war against England (even Pierre Laval rebuked him, saying "Isn't one defeat enough for you?"), enjoyed tracing the debacle to the French army's "inadmissible proportion of colonial and North African military men" and to France's "massive and regrettable number of naturalizations" (no wonder Jean-Marie Le Pen sounds so familiar to those of us who lived through the debacle).

Surveying the bleak panorama of hatreds and recriminations that followed the armistice of 1940, and the return to primeval chthonic deities summed up in the Pétainist slogan "Work, Family, Fatherland," Berl comes to the following bitter conclusion:

> The French cannot love their country without hating a good part, if not the majority, of their compatriots. Without having injured, disqualified, incarcerated, deported, or massacred enough to satisfy the exigencies of their zeal, they accuse themselves of moderation and tepidity. A good Frenchman looks on himself as such only if he has caused death during harsh periods, caused sufficient shame and ruin . . .

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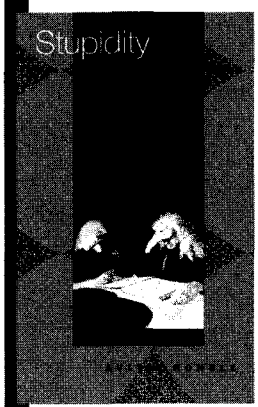
> amid a number of his compatriots to calm his dread that he has not given all the love he has to his fatherland. Unless avarice or personal or family egoism has not already made him indifferent to the public cause, his lack of fervor leads to self-loathing if he has not delivered other Frenchmen to the inquisition, to the police, to the executioners, to the grave-diggers.

Dreadful words. But as our own great historian Robert O. Paxton has proved, the "zeal" shown by the French when they informed on compatriots and delivered them to certain death would be amply manifested in the next shameful chapter of the nation's history—their treatment of Jewish compatriots. I've long been thankful that I did not live on in my native country to witness the infamy of those years, and that my mother brought me to safety when she did, thus preserving herself from the fatally heroic actions she would surely have undertaken as a resister. This sense of gratitude surged in me a few months ago, on my most recent trip to France, when I went to Villandry and stood in the room my mother and I had shared during those first months of the German occupation. It is now a dusty, attic-like storeroom, dense with cobwebs and filled with decrepit sofas, decaying storage bins, rusting furniture, heaps of plaster dust, the very foundation of its walls destroyed—a fitting metaphor, I guess, for the process of memory itself, its profusion and profligate messiness and devious multilayeredness.

As adults remembering a grave historical moment a half century past, we stare at such a room and say to ourselves: I may have gotten a lot of it wrong. Those first young Germans I saw parading down our road may have been singing "Deutschland über Alles" rather than "Lili Marlene." Kommandant Hebert may have been short and clean-shaven, not mustached and tall. The officers' car might have been a Hispano-Suiza, not a Mercedes. No matter. In those months during 1940, the fate of an entire generation was radically changed. In this room, this house, my life was transformed. I have not been the same child since.

Think



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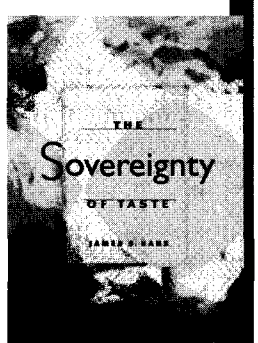

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They change the sky, not their mind, who cross the sea. A busy idleness possesses us; we seek a happy life with ships and carriages; the object of our search is present with us.

—HORACE,
Epistles I. xi, *c. 20 B.C.*

The attention of a traveler should be particularly turned, in the first place, to the various works of Nature, to mark the distinction of the climates he may explore, and to offer such useful observations on the different productions as may occur. . . . This world, as a glorious apartment of the boundless palace of the sovereign Creator, is furnished with an infinite variety of animated scenes, inexpressibly beautiful and pleasing, equally free to the inspection and enjoyment of all his creatures.

—WILLIAM BARTRAM,
Travels Through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, *1791*

One thing that's strange and wonderful about [wolves] is the way they go for one extra-long trip before settling down to den in April. They often go farther on these road trips than they've ever been before. Biologists who tell you on the one hand not to anthropomorphize will turn right around and state flatly that the wolves know they're going to be cooped up with the pups and want to go for one last adventure.

—RICK BASS,
The Ninemile Wolves, *1992*

The next morning, up early, and begun our march. The way about Puckrige very bad; and my wife in the very last dirty place of all got a fall but no hurt, though some dirt. At last she begun, poor wretch, to be tired, and I to be angry at it; but I was to blame, for she is a very good companion as long as she is well.

—SAMUEL PEPYS,
The Diary of Samuel Pepys, *September 18, 1661*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Travel

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

Going to Mongolia [by train] ought to be relaxing, I thought. . . . It was my good fortune to be wrong: being mistaken is the essence of the traveller's tale. What I had thought of as the simplest way of getting there—eight trains from London to the Chinese border—turned out to be odd and unexpected. Sometimes it seemed like real travel, full of those peculiar discoveries and satisfactions. But more often it was as if I had lost my footing in London and had fallen down a long flight of stairs, perhaps one of those endless staircases designed by a surrealist painter, and down I went, bump-bump-bump, and across the landing, and down again, bump-bump-bump, until I had fallen halfway around the world.

—PAUL THEROUX,
Riding the Iron Rooster: By Train Through China, *1988*

Now the true charm of pedestrianism does not lie in the walking, or in the scenery, but in the talking. The walking is good to time the movement of the tongue by, and to keep the blood and the brain stirred up and active; the scenery and the woodsy smells are good to bear in upon a man an unconscious and unobtrusive charm and solace to eye and soul and sense; but the supreme pleasure comes from the talk. It is no matter whether one talks wisdom or nonsense, the case is the same, the bulk of the enjoyment lies in the wagging of the gladsome jaw and the flapping of the sympathetic ear.

—MARK TWAIN,
A Tramp Abroad, *1880*

Driving through farm country at summer sunset provides a cavalcade of smells: cut grass, honeysuckle, spearmint, wheat chaff, scallions, chicory, tar from the macadam road. Stumbling on new smells is one of the delights of traveling.

—DIANE ACKERMAN,
A Natural History of the Senses, *1990*

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The sand, the Pyramids, the Sphinx, all gray and bathed in a great rosy light; the sky perfectly blue, eagles slowly wheeling and gliding around the tips of the Pyramids. We stop before the Sphinx; it fixes us with a terrifying stare; Maxime is quite pale; I am afraid of becoming giddy, and try to control my emotion. We ride off madly at full speed among the stones.

—GUSTAVE FLAUBERT,
notebooks of his trip to Egypt, December 7, 1849

One day the stars will be as familiar to each man as the landmarks, the curves, and the hills on the road that leads to his door, and one day this will be an airborne life. But by then men will have forgotten how to fly; they will be passengers on machines whose conductors are carefully promoted to a familiarity with labelled buttons, and in whose minds knowledge of the sky and the wind and the way of weather will be extraneous as passing fiction. And the days of the clipper ships will be recalled again—and people will wonder if clipper means ancients of the sea or ancients of the air.

—BERYL MARKHAM,
West with the Night, *1942*

What Lindbergh was the first to do, by an act of superb intelligence and will, millions of us accomplish regularly with the expenditure of no more intelligence and will than is required to purchase a ticket and pack a bag.

—BRENDAN GILL,
Lindbergh Alone, *1977*

It is said he never made a journey with fewer than a thousand carriages, his mules shod with silver and their drivers clad in wool of Canusium, attended by a train of Mazaces [celebrated horsemen of Mauretania] and carriers with bracelets and trappings.

—SUETONIUS,
on Nero, in Lives of the Caesars, XXX, *c. 110 A.D.*

It is possible to drive from here to California and stay at more or less the same motel the entire way.

—IAN FRAZIER,
in William Zinsser's They Went, *1991*

Yet wild as they were, these mountains were thickly peopled. As I climbed farther, I found the broad dusty paths made by the elk, as they filed across the mountain side. The grass on all the terraces was trampled down by deer; there were numerous tracks of wolves, and in some of the rougher and more precipitous parts of the ascent, I found footprints different from any that I had ever seen, and which I took to be those of the Rocky Mountain sheep. I sat down upon a rock; there was a perfect stillness. No wind was stirring, and not even an insect could be heard.

—FRANCIS PARKMAN,
The Oregon Trail, *1849*

In his old age James McNeill Whistler often used to walk down to the Atlantic shore carrying a few thin planks and his paints. On the planks he painted, day after day, in broad, blurred washes representing the sky, water, and shore, three blurry light-filled stripes. These are late Whistlers; I like them very much. In the high Arctic I thought of them. If I loosed my eyes from my shoes, the gravel at my feet, or the chaos of ice at the shore, I saw what newborn babies must see: nothing but senseless variations of light on the retinas. The world was a color-field painting wrapped around me at an unknown distance; I hesitated to take a step.

—ANNIE DILLARD,
Teaching a Stone to Talk:
Expeditions and Encounters, *1982*

The end of one journey is simply the start of another. You have to see what you missed the first time, see again what you already saw, see in springtime what you saw in summer, in daylight what you saw at night, see the sun shining where you saw the rain falling, see the crops growing, the fruit ripen, the stone which has moved, the shadow that was not there before. You have to go back to the footsteps already taken, to go over them again or add fresh ones alongside them. You have to start the journey anew. Always. The traveller sets out once more.

—JOSÉ SARAMAGO,
Journey to Portugal, *1990*
(translated by Amanda Hopkinson and Nick Caistor)

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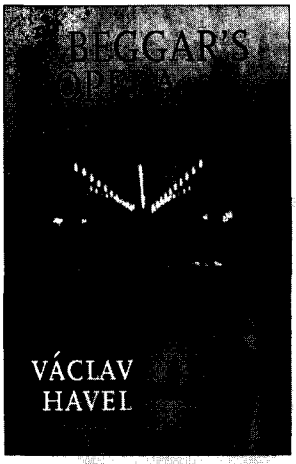

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Fever and Flame

J. M. COETZEE

He lives in a one-room flat near Mowbray railway station, for which he pays eleven guineas a month. On the last working day of each month, he catches the train in to the city, to Loop Street, where A. & B. Levy, property agents, have their brass plate and tiny office. To Mr. B. Levy, younger of the Levy brothers, he hands the envelope with the rent. Mr. Levy pours the money out onto his cluttered desk and counts it. Grunting and sweating, he writes a receipt. "Voilà, young man!" he says, and passes it over with a flourish.

He is at pains not to be late with the rent because he is in the flat under false pretenses. When he signed the lease and paid A. & B. Levy the deposit, he gave his occupation not as "Student" but as "Library Assistant," with the university library as his work address.

It is not a lie, not entirely. From Monday to Friday it is his job to man the reading room during evening hours. It is a job that the regular librarians, women for the most part, prefer not to do because the campus, up on the mountainside, is too bleak and lonely at night. Even he feels a chill down his spine as he unlocks the back door and gropes his way down a pitch-dark corridor to the mains switch. It would be all too easy for some evildoer to hide in the stacks when the staff go home at five o'clock, then rifle the empty offices and wait in the dark to waylay him, the night assistant, for his keys.

J. M. Coetzee, Professor of Social Thought at the University of Chicago, is the author of *Waiting for the Barbarians, Life and Times of Michael K.*, and *Disgrace*, among other novels. He has twice won the Booker Prize. This reminiscence of the author's student days at the University of Cape Town is excerpted from *Youth* (forthcoming from Viking Press), a sequel to *Boyhood*. Coetzee lives in Australia.

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Few students make use of the evening opening; few are even aware of it There is little for him to do. The ten shillings per evening he earns is easy money.

He is reading *The Letters of Ezra Pound.* Ezra Pound was dismissed from his job at Wabash College in Indiana for having a woman in his rooms. Infuriated by such provincial small-mindedness, Pound quit America. In London he met and married the beautiful Dorothy Shakespear and went to live in Italy. After World War II he was accused of aiding and abetting the Fascists. To escape the death sentence, he pleaded insanity and was locked up in a mental asylum.

Now, in 1959, having been set free, Pound is back in Italy, still working on his life's project, the *Cantos.* All the *Cantos* that have been published thus far are in the University of Cape Town library, in Faber editions in which the procession of lines in an elegant dark typeface is interrupted now and again, as though by strokes of a gong, by huge Chinese characters. He is engrossed by the *Cantos;* he reads and rereads them (guiltily skipping the dull sections on Van Buren and the Malatestas), using Hugh Kenner's book on Pound as a guide. T. S. Eliot magnanimously called Pound *il miglior fabbro,* the better craftsman. Much as he admires Eliot's own work, he thinks Eliot is right.

Ezra Pound has suffered persecution most of his life: driven into exile, then imprisoned, then expelled from his homeland a second time. Yet despite being labeled a madman, Pound has proved he is a great poet, perhaps as great as Walt Whitman. Obeying his daimon, Pound has sacrificed his life to his art. So has Eliot, though Eliot's suffering has been of a more private nature. Eliot and Pound have lived lives of sorrow and sometimes of ignominy. There is a lesson for him in that, driven home on every page of their poetry—of Eliot's, with which he had his first overwhelming encounter while he was still at school, and now of Pound's. Like Pound and Eliot, he must be prepared to endure all that life has stored up for him, even if that means exile, obscure labor, and obloquy. And if he fails the highest test of art, if it turns out that after all he does not have the blessed gift, then he must be prepared to endure that too: the immovable verdict of history, the fate of being, despite all his present and future sufferings, minor. Many are called, few are chosen. For every major poet a cloud of minor poets, like gnats buzzing around a lion.

His passion for Pound is shared by only one of his friends, Norbert. Norbert was born in Czechoslovakia, came to South Africa after the war, and speaks English with a faint German lisp. He is studying to be an engineer, like his father. He dresses with elegant European formality and is conducting a highly respectable courtship of a beautiful girl of good family with whom he goes walking once a week. He and Norbert have meetings in a tearoom on the slopes of the mountain, at which they comment on each other's

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latest poems and read aloud to each other favorite passages from Pound.

It strikes him as interesting that Norbert, an engineer to be, and he, a mathematician to be, should be disciples of Ezra Pound, while the other student poets he knows, those studying literature and running the university's literary magazine, follow Gerard Manley Hopkins. He himself went through a brief Hopkins phase at school, during which he crammed lots of stressed monosyllables into his verses and avoided words of Romance origin. But in time he lost his taste for Hopkins, just as he is in the process of losing his taste for Shakespeare. Hopkins's lines are crammed too tight with consonants, Shakespeare's too tight with metaphors. Hopkins and Shakespeare also set too much store on uncommon words, particularly Old English words: *maw, reck, pelf.* He does not see why verse has always to be rising to a declamatory pitch, why it cannot be content to follow the flexions of the ordinary speaking voice—in fact, why it has to be so different from prose.

He has begun to prefer Pope to Shakespeare, and Swift to Pope. Despite the cruel precision of his phrasing, of which he approves, Pope strikes him as still too much at home among petticoats and periwigs, whereas Swift remains a wild man, a solitary.

He likes Chaucer, too. The Middle Ages are boring, obsessed with chastity, overrun with clerics; medieval poets are for the most part timid, forever scuttling to the Latin fathers for guidance. But Chaucer keeps a nice ironic distance from his authorities. And, unlike Shakespeare, he does not get into a froth about things and start ranting.

As for the other English poets, Pound has taught him to smell out the easy sentiment in which the Romantics and Victorians wallow, to say nothing of their slack versifying. Pound and Eliot are trying to revitalize Anglo-American poetry by bringing back to it the astringency of the French. He is fully in accord. How he could once have been so infatuated with Keats as to write Keatsian sonnets he cannot comprehend. Keats is like watermelon, soft and sweet and crimson, whereas poetry should be hard and clear like a flame. Reading half a dozen pages of Keats is like yielding to seduction.

He would be more secure in his discipleship to Pound if he could actually read French. But all his efforts to teach himself lead nowhere. He has no feel for the language, with its words that start out boldly only to tail off in a murmur. So he must take it on trust from Pound and Eliot that Baudelaire and Nerval, Corbière and Laforgue, point the way he must follow.

His plan when he entered the university was to qualify as a mathematician, then go abroad and devote himself to art. That is as far as the plan went, as far as it needed to go, and he has not thus far deviated from it. While perfecting his poetic skills abroad he will earn a living doing something obscure and respectable. Since great artists are fated to go unrecognized for a while, he imagines he will serve out his probationary

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years as a clerk, humbly adding up columns of figures in a back room. He will certainly not be a Bohemian—that is to say, a drunk and a sponger and a layabout.

What draws him to mathematics, besides the arcane symbols it uses, is its purity. If there were a department of Pure Thought at the university he would probably enroll in pure thought too; but pure mathematics appears to be the closest approach the academy affords to the realm of the forms.

There is one obstacle to his plan of study, however: regulations do not permit one to study pure mathematics to the exclusion of everything else. Most of the students in his class do a mix of pure mathematics, applied mathematics, and physics. This is not a direction he finds himself able to follow. Though as a child he had a desultory interest in rocketry and nuclear fission, he has no feel for what is called the real world, fails to understand why things in physics are as they are. Why, for instance, does a bouncing ball eventually stop bouncing? His fellow students have no difficulty with the question: because its coefficient of elasticity is always less than one, they say. But why does it have to be so, he asks? Why can the coefficient not be exactly one, or more than one? They shrug their shoulders. We live in the real world, they say: in the real world the coefficient of elasticity is always less than one. It does not sound to him like an answer.

Since he would appear to have no sympathy with the real world, he avoids the sciences, filling in the empty slots in his curriculum with courses in English, philosophy, classical studies. He would like to be thought of as a mathematics student who happens to take a few arts courses; but among the science students he is, to his chagrin, viewed as an outsider, a dilettante who turns up for mathematics lectures and then disappears, God knows where.

Considering that he is going to be a mathematician, he ought to spend most of his time on mathematics. But mathematics is easy, whereas Latin is not. Latin is his weakest subject. Years of drilling at his Catholic school have embedded in him the logic of Latin syntax; he can write correct if plodding Ciceronian prose; but Virgil and Horace, with their haphazard word order and rebarbative word stock, continue to baffle him.

He is assigned to a Latin tutorial group in which most of the other students take Greek as well. Knowing Greek makes Latin easy for them; he has to struggle to keep up, not to make a fool of himself. He wishes he had gone to a school that taught Greek.

One of the secret attractions of mathematics is that it uses the Greek alphabet. Though he knows no Greek words beyond *hubris* and *arēte* and *eleutheria,* he spends hours perfecting his Greek script, pressing harder on the downstrokes to give the effect of a Bodoni typeface. Greek and pure mathematics are in his eyes the noblest subjects one can study at a university. From afar he reveres the lecturers in Greek, whose courses he cannot take: Anton Paap, the papyrologist; Maurice Pope, translator of Sophocles; Maurits Heemstra, commentator on Heraclitus. Together with Douglas

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Sears, professor of pure mathematics, they inhabit an exalted realm.

Despite his best efforts, his marks for Latin are not high. It is Roman history that brings him down every time. The lecturer assigned to teach Roman history is a pale, unhappy Englishman whose real interest is *Digenis Akrites*. The law students, taking Latin under compulsion, sense his weakness and torment him. They come in late and leave early; they throw paper airplanes; they whisper loudly while he is talking; when he produces one of his limp witticisms they laugh raucously and drum with their feet and will not stop.

The truth is, he is as bored as the law students, and perhaps their lecturer, too, by fluctuations in the price of wheat during the reign of Commodus. Without facts there is no history, and he has never had a head for facts: when examinations come around and he is invited to offer his thoughts on what caused what in the late Empire, he stares at the empty page in misery.

They read Tacitus in translation: dry recitals of the excesses and outrages of the emperors in which only the inexplicable hurry of sentence after sentence hints at irony. If he is going to be a poet, he ought to be taking lessons from Catullus, poet of love, whom they are translating in tutorials; but it is Tacitus, the historian, whose Latin is so difficult that he cannot follow it in the original, who truly grips him.

Following Pound's recommendation, he has read Flaubert, first *Madame Bovary*, then *Salammbô*, Flaubert's novel of ancient Carthage, just as he has sternly refrained from reading Victor Hugo. Hugo is a windbag, says Pound, whereas Flaubert brings to the writing of prose the hard, jeweler's craft of poetry. Out of Flaubert come first Henry James, then Conrad and Ford Madox Ford.

He likes Flaubert. Emma Bovary in particular, with her dark eyes, her restless sensuality, her readiness to give herself, has him in her thrall. He would like to go to bed with Emma, hear the famous belt whistle like a snake as she undresses. But would Pound approve? He is not sure that wanting to meet Emma is a good enough reason for admiring Flaubert. In his sensibility there is still, he suspects, something rotten, something Keatsian.

Of course Emma Bovary is a fictional creation, he will never run into her on the street. But Emma was not created out of nothing: she had her origin in the flesh-and-blood experiences of her author, experiences that were then subjected to the transfiguring fire of art. If Emma had an original, or several originals, then it follows that women like Emma and Emma's original should exist in the real world. And even if this is not so, even if no woman in the real world is quite like Emma, there must be many women so deeply affected by their reading of *Madame Bovary* that they fall under Emma's spell and are transformed into versions of her. They may not be the real Emma, but in a sense they are her living embodiment.

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His ambition is to read everything worth reading before he goes overseas, so that he will not arrive in Europe a provincial bumpkin. As guides to reading, he relies upon Eliot and Pound. On their authority he dismisses without a glance shelf after shelf of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Meredith. Nor is anything that came out of nineteenth-century Germany or Italy or Spain or Scandinavia worthy of attention. Russia may have produced some interesting monsters, but as artists the Russians have nothing to teach. Civilization since the eighteenth century has been an Anglo-French affair.

On the other hand, there are pockets of high civilization in remoter times that one cannot afford to neglect: not only Athens and Rome but also the Germany of Walther von der Vogelweide, the Provence of Arnaut Daniel, the Florence of Dante and Guido Cavalcanti, to say nothing of Tang China and Moghul India and Almoravid Spain. So unless he learns Chinese and Persian and Arabic, or at least enough of the languages to read their classics with a crib, he might as well be a barbarian. Where will he find the time?

In his English courses he did not at the beginning fare well. His tutor in literature was a young Welshman named Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones was new to South Africa; this was his first proper job. The law students, enrolled only because English, like Latin, was a required subject, had sniffed out his uncertainty at once: they yawned in his face, played stupid, parodied his speech, until sometimes he grew quite desperate.

Their first assignment was to write a critical analysis of a poem by Andrew Marvell. Though not sure what exactly was meant by critical analysis, he did his best. Mr. Jones gave him a gamma. Gamma was not the lowest mark on the scale—there was still gamma-minus, to say nothing of the varieties of delta—but it was not good. Numbers of students, including law students, were awarded betas; there was even a solitary alpha-minus. Indifferent to poetry though they might be, there was something these classmates of his knew that he did not. But what was it? How did one get to be good at English?

Mr. Jones, Mr. Bryant, Miss Wilkinson: all his teachers were young and, it seemed to him, helpless, suffering the persecutions of the law students in silence, hoping they would grow tired and relent. As for himself, he felt little sympathy for their plight. What he wanted from his teachers was authority, not an exhibition of vulnerability.

In the three years since Mr. Jones, his marks for English have slowly crept up. But he has never been at the top of the class, has always, in a certain sense, been struggling, unsure of what the study of literature ought to be. Compared with literary criticism, the philological side of English has been a relief. At least with Old English verb conjugations or sound changes in Middle English one knows where one is.

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Now, in his fourth year, he has enrolled for a course in early English prose writers taught by Professor Guy Howarth. He is the only student. Howarth has a reputation for being dry, pedantic, but he does not mind that. He has nothing against pedants. He prefers them to showmen.

They meet once a week in Howarth's office. Howarth reads his lecture aloud while he takes notes. After a few meetings Howarth simply lends him the text of the lecture to take home and read.

The lectures, which are typed in faint ribbon on crisp, yellowing paper, come out of a cabinet in which there seems to be a file on every English author from Austen to Yeats. Is that what one has to do to become a professor of English: read the established authors and write a lecture on each? How many years of one's life does that eat up? What does it do to one's spirit?

Howarth, who is an Australian, seems to have taken a liking to him, he cannot see why. For his part, though he cannot say he likes Howarth, he does feel protective of him for his gaucherie, for his delusion that South African students care in the least what he thinks about Gascoigne or Lyly or, for that matter, Shakespeare.

On the last day of term, after their final session together, Howarth issues an invitation. "Come by the house tomorrow evening for a drink."

He obeys, but with a sinking heart. Beyond their exchanges on the Elizabethan prosaists, he has nothing to say to Howarth. In addition, he does not like drinking. Even wine, after the first sip, tastes sour to him, sour and heavy and unpleasant. He cannot see why people pretend to enjoy it.

They sit in the dim, high-ceilinged living room of the Howarths' home in the Gardens. He appears to be the only one invited. Howarth talks about Australian poetry, about Kenneth Slessor and A. D. Hope. Mrs. Howarth breezes in, breezes out again. He senses that she does not like him, finds him a prig, lacking in *joie de vivre,* lacking in repartee. Lilian Howarth is Howarth's second wife. No doubt she was a beauty in her day, but now she is simply a squat little woman with spindly legs and too much powder on her face. She is also, according to report, a lush, given to embarrassing scenes when drunk.

It emerges that he has been invited for a purpose. The Howarths are going abroad for six months. Would he be prepared to stay in their house and look after it? There will be no rent to pay, no bills, few responsibilities.

He accepts on the spot. He is flattered to be asked, even if it is only because he seems dull and dependable. Also, if he gives up his flat in Mowbray, he can save more quickly toward a boat ticket to England. And the house—a huge, rambling pile on the lower slopes of the mountain, with dark passages and musty, unused rooms—has an allure of its own.

There is one catch. For the first month he will have to share the house with guests of the Howarths, a woman from New Zealand and her three-year-old daughter.

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The woman from New Zealand turns out to be another drinker. Shortly after he has moved in, she wanders into his room in the middle of the night and into his bed. She embraces him, presses against him, gives him wet kisses. He does not know what to do. He does not like her, does not desire her, is repelled by her slack lips seeking out his mouth. First a cold shiver runs through him, then panic. "No!" he cries out. "Go away!" And he curls himself up in a ball.

Unsteadily she clambers out of his bed. "Bastard!" she hisses, and is gone.

They continue to share the big house until the end of the month, avoiding each other, listening for the creak of a floorboard, averting their gaze when their paths happen to cross. They have made fools of themselves, but at least she was a reckless fool, which is forgivable, while he was a prude and a dummy.

He has never been drunk in his life. He abhors drunkenness. He leaves parties early to escape the stumbling, inane talk of people who have drunk too much. In his opinion, drunken drivers ought to have their sentences doubled instead of halved. But in South Africa every excess committed under the influence of liquor is looked on indulgently. Farmers can flog their laborers to death as long as they are drunk when they do so. Ugly men can force themselves on women, ugly women make overtures to men; if one resists, one is not playing the game.

He has read Henry Miller. If a drunken woman had slipped into bed with Henry Miller, the fucking and no doubt the drinking as well would have gone on all night. Were Henry Miller merely a satyr, a monster of indiscriminate appetite, he could be ignored. But Henry Miller is an artist, and his stories, outrageous though they may be and probably full of lies, are stories of an artist's life. Henry Miller writes about the Paris of the 1930s, a city of artists and women who loved artists. If women threw themselves at Henry Miller, then, *mutatis mutandis*, they must have thrown themselves at Ezra Pound and Ford Madox Ford and Ernest Hemingway and all the other great artists who lived in Paris in those years, to say nothing of Pablo Picasso. What is *he* going to do once he is in Paris or London? Is he going to persist in not playing the game?

Besides his horror of drunkenness, he has a horror of physical ugliness. When he reads Villon's *Testament*, he can think only of how ugly the *belle heaumière* sounds, wrinkled and unwashed and foulmouthed. If one is to be an artist, must one love women indiscriminately? Does an artist's life entail sleeping with anyone and everyone, in the name of life? If one is finicky about sex, is one rejecting life?

Another question: What made Marie, from New Zealand, decide he was worth getting into bed with? Was it simply because he was there, or had she heard from Howarth that he was a poet, a poet to be? Women love artists because they burn with an inner flame, a flame that consumes yet

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paradoxically renews all that it touches. When she slipped into his bed, Marie must have thought she would be licked by the flame of art, and experience an ecstasy beyond words. Instead she found herself being pushed away by a panic-stricken boy. Surely, one way or another, she will have her revenge. Surely, in the next letter from her, her friends the Howarths will get a version of events in which he will come out looking like a nincompoop.

He knows that to condemn a woman for being ugly is morally despicable. But fortunately, artists do not have to be morally admirable people. All that matters is that they create great art. If his own art is to come out of the more contemptible side of himself, so be it. Flowers grow best on dungheaps, as Shakespeare never tires of saying. Even Henry Miller, who presents himself as such a straightforward fellow, ready to make love to any woman no matter her shape or size, probably has a dark side, which he is prudent enough to conceal.

Normal people find it hard to be bad. Normal people, when they feel badness flare up within them, drink, swear, commit violence. Badness is to them like a fever: they want it out of their system, they want to go back to being normal. But artists have to live with their fever, whatever its nature, good or bad. The fever is what makes them artists; the fever must be kept alive. That is why artists can never be wholly present to the world: one eye has always to be turned inward. As for women who flock after artists, they cannot wholly be trusted. For just as the spirit of the artist is both flame and fever, so the woman who yearns to be licked by tongues of flame will at the same time do her best to quench the fever and bring down the artist to common ground. Therefore women have to be resisted even when they are loved. They cannot be allowed close enough to the flame to nip it out.

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The Vienna Three-step

DANIEL GUTSTEIN

One-two-three, one-two-three
I twirl through the hallway.

In one part of the house
night sets
and Grandfather yawns.

In another part of the house
day rises
and Grandmother stretches.

*

I chop eggs and onion for *ayer mit tzibellach,*
grate onion and potatoes for *potaternyick.*

They eat with me and Grandfather tells
the story that begins with the rifle cracks
of horsemen and ends with him scrambling
aboard a train filled with refugees.

Grandmother's family fled in open wagons.
She remembers her mother rocking the youngest,
frozen dead, the whole way to Vienna.

He calls her Mielec, for where she was born.
She calls him Sanok, the same in return.

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When they met in Vienna beside a music hall
they danced for three straight nights
and married on the fourth.

*

Dusk blazes
with constellations of fireflies.

He extends his elbow
and she takes it,
the two of them
walking down the steps,
outside, for a stroll.

He is the milk of the moon
spilling onto my chest.
Braids of gray sunlight
are boughs of her hair forever.

Through the bay window
I see them stop and dance:

One-two-three, one-two-three,
just like those waltzes
beside the blue Danube,
for three straight nights
in 1932.

~ Daniel Gutstein's work has appeared in *Ploughshares, Prairie Schooner, TriQuarterly,* and *Fiction,* among other publications.

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Not the Soul

MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL

Not, in all likelihood, the soul, with its many rallies,
nor the heart, with its dyspeptic series of fits and starts,
is exactly in charge of us, I fathom, but more likely
the gull, who this very moment is hovering over the roofs
here on rue Thubaneau, more likely the sins of our fathers
and the angelic meanderings of our children, more likely
the blessed burdens of our disenfranchisements,
the floating abstractions, the tea breaks and coffee breaks,
the elliptical series of ruinations that await us, and then, even,
more likely our betrayals, the sense of our own sinfulness,
and, even if they are unwarranted, our fears of retribution,
our daily descents into reverie and nightmare, our retroactive
corrections and prospective failures, our unwillingness to barter
what little skills we may be possessed of—the embroidered doilies,
the remarkable filigrees—for a small portion of the world's
tangible sanctities. Ah, friends, so many kinds of couscous available
on this very street—merguez, poulet, agneau, royale, even végétarien—
and at so many prices, as if the world were, if not our oyster, at least
our couscous, convertible, now, to euros, in that single currency
which would make of us all a continent, and then, later, a world,
a signifier signified, a bird flying over this house, whooping
and laughing, trying to make us change in the baffled, now-
homogenized currency of extravagance and hope, and of air.

Michael Blumenthal's memoir, *All My Fathers and Mothers*, was recently published by HarperCollins. His latest book of poems is *Dusty Angel*. He lives, teaches, and writes in France and Hungary.

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John Reed's Unblinking Stare

IAN FRAZIER

Though Russia produced a lot of great books in the nineteenth century, it did the opposite in the twentieth. Probably nowhere in history could you find as many tendentious, pat, lifeless works of literature as appeared in Russia between the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the end of the Soviet Union seventy-four years later. Official Soviet publishing emitted volumes by and about great Communist leaders in profusion, as well as untold millions of books by sanctioned authors of the school of Socialist Realism, a style that breathed moribundity not only on writing but on painting and sculpture and drama and film. Most books of the Communist era in Russia are as dead and unread today as the novels of Tolstoy are vital and current. Interesting only as artifacts, the myriad tomes of the Soviets sit unopened on shelves, avoided by all—a ghost-metropolis of print, like the military ghost towns from the time of the Cold War that are now falling apart across the former Soviet Union.

Recently I've wondered where this change in literary fortunes leaves the American writer John Reed. When Reed died in Moscow in 1920, just a few days before his thirty-third birthday, he was best known as a journalist and the author of *Ten Days That Shook the World,* an eyewitness account of the 1917 October Revolution in Petrograd. Reed was known also for his espousal of an international brand of Communism that called for worldwide proletarian revolution. The American government feared him; at the time of his death, he was under federal indictment, along with a number of other radicals, for conspiracy to overthrow it.

Ian Frazier writes essays and longer works of nonfiction. His books include *Great Plains, Family, On the Rez,* and *The Fish's Eye,* a collection of outdoor essays just published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. He plans to write a book about Siberia.

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The rigors he suffered for the cause helped bring on the typhus that killed him. The Russians gave him a big state funeral with many hours of speeches by leading Bolsheviks, and buried him beside the Kremlin Wall, in a place of honor for heroes of the Revolution. The year after he died, his New York publishers brought out a new edition of *Ten Days* with an introduction by Lenin. Actually, all Lenin wrote was a short paragraph, what today would more likely be called a blurb. Lenin said that he read the book "with never-slackening attention" and that he recommended it unreservedly to the workers of the world. Given Lenin's and his followers' larger effect on literature, this endorsement is no longer as persuasive as it perhaps once was.

A Russian-language edition of *Ten Days* issued by a Soviet publisher in 1987 begins with an editor's preface that sketches Reed's biography. It follows the conventions of depicting the Communist revolutionary hero: bourgeois childhood, early schooling, experiences of capitalist oppression, participation in strikes and protests leading to jailing, discovery of Marxism-Leninism, commitment to the Revolution, and so on. The broad outlines of Reed's life seem ideal for an inspirational portrait in Socialist-Realist profile. What's unique about Reed, though, is that he fits a certain kind of heroic American portrait equally well. From the point of view of many of his contemporaries in America and those who came later, Reed was a romantic figure: brave, clever, adventurous, funny, beloved by women, someone you'd completely want to be—in short, a cool guy. Among certain artistic-romantic collegiate types, Reed was as cool as you can get, almost literally: if you got any cooler than he was, you'd start coming back the other way.

Reed cultivated the impression he made, and liked being seen as legendary. Born into one of the leading families of Portland, Oregon, in 1887, Reed grew up a mediocre student but a tireless reader, especially of historical works and of romances by writers like Walter Scott and Thomas Malory. Arrived at Harvard in 1906, he discovered, as many outlanders have done, that being Somebody in Portland, Oregon, didn't mean much in East Coast society. Not one "final" club invited him to join (a disappointment that has gone into the making of more than one leftist). Reed became big news at Harvard anyway, contributing poems and stories to campus publications, leading cheers at football games, writing a play for the Hasty Pudding society. He impressed classmates with grand and colorful gestures, such as hopping a ship for Bermuda with friends during spring vacation and returning late and getting in trouble with the dean. Traveling in Europe with other Harvard alums the year after graduation, he suggested to one that they should take a tramp steamer back to America and arrive on the eve of the Harvard-Yale game. "It would be such a characteristic thing for us to do," he explained.

For lack of a better, Reed's club at Harvard was the Lampoon, which publishes the college's humor magazine. As a Lampoon member myself in the

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sixties, I encountered the still-strong myth that Reed (class of 1910) had left behind. A senior showing us recent electees around the Lampoon building—an architectural whimsy in the style of a pocket-sized Dutch castle—pointed out a round stained-glass panel in one of the high, arched windows. On a deep red background were John Reed's name and class year, below an elegantly rendered, silvery Soviet hammer and sickle. In the dark richness of the building's interior, redolent of leather and spilled Scotch and mold, the symbol shrilled a faraway cry of dissent. Seeing it blew me away, and elevated the place's mystique to a level of the near-surreal. Here we were in the deepest years of the Cold War, and this club's grads included not only the predictable Harvard big shots but also this guy, John Reed, friend and confidant of Lenin, founding boss of the *other side* . . .

Reed's favorite professor at college was Charles Townsend Copeland, who taught English composition. Evidently tiring of the Wildean and Swinburnian musings common among undergraduates of the day, Copeland encouraged his students to write in simple language about their actual experiences and to look for (in Reed's words) "the hidden beauty of the visible world." Shortly after college Reed moved to New York City to make his career as a writer. He wanted to write poetry, but journalism came naturally to him. Like others before and after, he learned the craft as he explored and wrote about New York. Magazines published his work and wanted more. In 1914, *Metropolitan* magazine, a liberal general-interest publication, sent him to Mexico to cover the burgeoning Mexican Revolution. Reed went to Texas, sneaked across the border, found a force of rebels and rode with them, met rebel leader Pancho Villa and got to know him, survived bloody battles, drank and danced with the rebels, and ended up writing a book that made him famous.

Insurgent Mexico, published in 1914, is an exciting first-person account, vague on political context but strong on atmosphere. Cavalry patrols ride in silhouette against the desert sunset, bullets zip by in flocks, shot-up adobe walls go Thud! as bits of clay fly, Villa laughs and yawns and stretches, young beauties use chandelier lusters for earrings, plazas full of peasants cheer. What's most remarkable, from our perspective in time, is the voice Reed writes in. For example, in a passage following his escape from a battle in which many of his rebel friends have died, a woman comes to Reed and asks to spend the night with him; Reed agrees, despite the angry protests of a rebel who has claimed her, and after describing this contretemps, which the reader understands could have cost his life, Reed says,

> We had been living in a nightmare of battle and death—all of us. I think everybody was a little dazed and excited. I know I was.

That flat, laconic, understated voice, the quiet music of simple words and short sentences that would become the distinctive American voice of the cen-

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tury, sounds throughout *Insurgent Mexico.* Hemingway would later stylize it and hyperstylize it, and it would echo in the work of countless other writers and through detective novels and advertising copy and Humphrey Bogart dialogue and on and on. But in Reed it's still the plain, pure note, before people even knew it was a style.

Metropolitan magazine, where the dispatches that became *Insurgent Mexico* first appeared, crowed about Reed and called him the best war correspondent around. Reed came back to New York, and when war began in Europe, naturally it was the next place the magazine sent him. Trench warfare, however, had none of the dash and vividness Reed had found in Mexico. He hated the war and saw no country to prefer among the combatants. All the governments were equally bloody in his eyes, using working people to fight disputes of the rich, wasting innocent lives in a quarrel over profits. He thought the United States would be crazy to get involved. His feelings made writing about the war a challenge, so he tried to keep his interest up by ignoring limits set for correspondents and going places the authorities didn't want him to. He visited the front lines of the French; then, with some other correspondents, he finagled his way over to the German lines.

Accompanied by a young lieutenant, Reed and another correspondent walked along the German trenches one night among detonations and whizzing bullets that sometimes hit so close they spattered mud on Reed's cheek. At a forward position the three stopped and the lieutenant pointed out the opposing French trenches just 140 meters away. Flares were going off overhead amidst irregular firing from both sides. The lieutenant suggested to Reed and his companion that they take a shot themselves. Borrowing a Mauser from a nearby soldier, the lieutenant handed it to Reed. Reed aimed and fired twice in the direction of the French lines. The other correspondent did the same. Maybe Reed was responding to the stress of being under fire, or to a frontline version of visitor's etiquette, or to his general disgust with the war. He never mentioned the incident in his writings, so his motivation remains a mystery.

In any event, the shots were fateful ones for Reed. By taking them he set himself apart from most other English-speaking reporters covering the war. America was still neutral, but its sympathies obviously were with the Allies. When the story of the incident appeared in the *New York Evening Post*—the other correspondent, a man named Robert Dunn, described it there in detail—people got mad. The French government was especially incensed, and said that Reed (in New York again by that time) would not be allowed to re-enter France. This meant that the Western Front was now closed to him. *Metropolitan* was still eager to publish his war dispatches, so when he returned to Europe in the fall of 1915, he went to the Eastern Front instead. Accompanied by an illustrator named Boardman Robinson, he began his reporting travels in the Balkans, where he saw carnage even more sicken-

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ing than he'd witnessed in France. From Serbia he and Robinson continued on to Russia. There the war seemed farther away, and the country much as it had always been. Reed took one look around and fell permanently in love.

The intense infatuation that can strike first-time travelers in Russia is an identifiable state of mind, as place-specific as the messianic fantasies that occasionally possess visitors to the Holy Land. Certain travelers just happen to be susceptible to falling in love with Russia, and Reed was one of them. In *The War in Eastern Europe* (1916), a collection of his reporting from this trip, he wrote:

> Russia's is an original civilization that spreads by its own power. Loose and easy and strong, it invades the life of the far-flung savage tribes of Asia; it crosses the frontiers into Rumania, Galicia, East Prussia—in spite of organized efforts to stop it. . . . And it takes hold of the minds of men because it is the most comfortable, the most liberal way of life. Russian ideas are the most exhilarating, Russian thought the freest, Russian art the most exuberant; Russian food and drink are to me the best, and Russians themselves are, perhaps, the most interesting human beings that exist.

Bureaucratic snafus gave Reed and Boardman a lot of trouble as they tried to report on the Russian war effort. Permission to travel was granted and then withheld, they spent weeks at a time in a hotel under house arrest, authorities accused them of being spies. The trip, which he had expected to take two months, stretched on for seven. Reed had read Dostoyevsky, and the worse things got, the more interestingly Russian and literary they seemed.

He left late in 1915 with his love for the country undimmed. Over the next two years his life went through several other plot twists: while visiting his mother in Portland, he met Louise Bryant, and they began a romance that would become a whole huge narrative of its own. He continued to keep up on news from Russia. With the abdication of the tsar early in 1917, the situation there had fallen into wild disarray. Reed had disdained the February Revolution of 1905 as a mere political change that transferred power to the bourgeoisie. But by mid-1917 the rise of the workers' and soldiers' soviets and the emergence of the Bolshevik Party portended a people's revolution of the most original and sweeping kind. If that was about to happen, Reed wanted to see it.

Reed probably would have gone to the Revolution even if he hadn't shot at the French or been smitten with Russia. The Revolution and he coincided; as Russia had tilted to the left in recent years, so had he. He had first picked up socialist ideas in college, where he attended meetings of Harvard's Socialist Club (its president was his classmate Walter Lippmann) but never became a member. By chance, back in Oregon at about that time, the

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lofty social position of Reed's family began to decline. Reed's father lost his job, sold insurance for a while, and then became a United States marshal helping a federal prosecutor bring land-fraud cases against some of Portland's big names. Many society folks considered him a turncoat and dropped the Reeds; the son admired the father for his anti-establishment stand.

In Greenwich Village in 1913, Reed met Big Bill Haywood, the famous leader of the Industrial Workers of the World, and got involved in an IWW strike of silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey. Much of Reed's writing also appeared in *The Masses,* a socialist monthly, and as he was covering the strike for that publication, the police arrested him and held him for four days in jail. On his release he and other artists and writers staged a cast-of-thousands pageant in Madison Square Garden, dramatizing the strikers' grievances. The pageant lost money and the bosses broke the strike, and afterward both failures persistently rankled Reed.

During the Mexican Revolution, Reed's sympathies were with Villa and the insurgents—he even wrote that if the U.S. decided to intervene on the government's side, he would fight with the rebels against his countrymen. When he covered a miners' strike in Colorado he expressed outrage at the massacre of strikers and women and children in the company town of Ludlow. The war in Europe received his strongest condemnation. He spoke out often and vigorously against it, arguing that the workingman's enemy was not Germany but the 2 percent of the U.S. population who controlled 60 percent of the wealth. To many Americans, expressing ideas like this constituted treason, especially after the country entered the war. An anti-war speech Reed gave in Philadelphia caused him to be indicted for discouraging enlistments, a federal crime (of which he was later acquitted). Reed had such a reputation as a radical by the time he decided to go back to Russia that no mainstream—that is, decently paying—magazine would publish him. Max Eastman, editor of *The Masses,* finally raised money for his travel expenses from a friend of the magazine.

Reed and Louise Bryant arrived in Petrograd in late September of 1917, not a day too soon. A military takeover led by a right-wing general, L. G. Kornilov, had been defeated a couple of weeks before. The Provisional Government and its president, Alexander Kerensky, still held power, but the Bolsheviks were getting stronger by the minute.

Their fervor in defending the Revolution from Kornilov had won them support and a bit of respectability. Many reporters and socialists from other countries had come to Petrograd, among them acquaintances of Reed's like the writer Albert Rhys Williams and the anarchist Bill Shatoff. They quickly filled Reed in on recent developments. Reed also had the advantage of being accepted both by the Bolsheviks and by the Provisional Government they were working to overthrow; the radicals saw in him a fellow revolutionary, and the government respected him as a reporter from America, a country whose good opinion it hoped to have.

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And so Reed dived into the reporting that would become *Ten Days That Shook the World*. Because of his passions and biases, he paid attention to intricacies of revolutionary politics that any other Western reporter would have summarized or skipped entirely. *Ten Days* is an example of a work of nonfiction that is actually much better for being complicated. After a preface giving a broad-brush Bolshevik explanation for the Revolution, the book begins with a chapter describing all the different political parties, organizations, and central committees that were in Petrograd in October of 1917. A reader might have to go over this chapter several times, with the help of a more recently published history, to follow exactly who was who. Yet the chapter's complicatedness, at first read, gives a good idea of the rising clamor of a revolution under way. Also, Reed diligently collected every political proclamation and handbill and poster he could find as they appeared in Petrograd, and he incorporated many of them in what he later wrote; indeed, much of the book and even more of the long appendix consists of quotations from these full-cry documents. As a lover of Russia, Reed was careful to include not only the documents but also the person he saw putting some of them up on walls around town: it was "a soldier, accompanied by a small boy with a pail of paste."

Reed spoke almost no Russian (though he did have some German and French). Other correspondents in Petrograd spoke the language better, had been there longer, knew more about Russia, took similar risks. Several of them wrote worthy, hard-won books that are now long out of print. Reed's book survived because he didn't follow the same commonsense paths as they. He didn't try to make the events he was describing easily understandable to the average reader in New York or London. The audience he imagined for *Ten Days* was grander: History, perhaps, or The Future Citizens of the Socialist World. He didn't waste many pages on what had come before the Revolution, and none on what came after; focusing only on the days of the actual putsch is the structural genius of the book. And, surprisingly, he didn't help the reader with suggestions of what to think (for example, "To have failed to see the hope in the Russian Revolution is to be as a blind man looking at a sunrise"—Bessie Beatty, in *The Red Heart of Russia*). Reed stated his interest in the preface, admitting, "In the struggle my sympathies were not neutral." Beyond that, he let what he considered the demonstrable rightness of the Bolshevik cause make his editorial point, through reporting whose thoroughness and intensity were endorsements themselves.

Reed's vision could even include the odd fact that didn't seem to fit in, like the vegetarian restaurant where he had dinner one night, an establishment called I Eat Nobody. The city in revolution was a hard-to-read place, part completely frantic and part no-affect and disengaged. People went to movies and ballets and restaurants while the Bolsheviks were maneuvering just up the street. Reed is excellent on the adrenaline specifics

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of uprising—on Smolny Institute, the former school for aristocratic girls where the soviets gathered, with all its lights burning in the middle of the night, the whole building "pounding like an overloaded dynamo," ammunition belts hanging snakelike from the four machine guns out front, and the delegates singing "The Internationale" and "La Marseillaise"; and the sound of the Red Army soldiers' feet as they marched; and the armored cars squatting monstrously in the dimness of a former Petrograd riding academy, waiting to move; and the disorder inside public offices; and the electric spark of rumor traveling; and the pedestrians all falling to the cobblestones at the sound of a stray shot and after a few minutes getting up and walking again. Or this, from a passage about a tumultuous meeting at Smolny:

> There was no heat in the hall but the stifling heat of human bodies. A foul blue cloud of cigarette smoke rose from the mass and hung in the thick air. Occasionally someone in authority mounted the tribune and asked the comrades not to smoke; then everybody, smokers and all, took up the cry, "Don't smoke, comrades!" and went on smoking.

On the night the Bolsheviks seized power, Reed was in the truck that roared through the streets of Petrograd distributing bundles of a printed broadside telling the news, and he even threw fistfuls from the truck himself, the sheets of paper making "a tail of white floating and eddying out behind." Later the same night he went to the Winter Palace, seat of the Provisional Government, to see what remained after it had been deposed. He and Louise Bryant and two other Americans got past the Red Guard sentries and wandered the vast building, finally coming to the gold-and-malachite chamber where the ministers had been in session when the government fell. He went down the long green baize table where the ministers had sat, a pen and paper in front of each chair; on the papers he saw scribbled rough drafts of plans and proclamations, mostly scratched out, "and the rest of the sheet covered with absent-minded geometrical designs, as the writers sat despondently listening while Minister after Minister proposed chimerical schemes."

The reader has to get a spooky feeling, knowing how this will end. The glorious People's Revolution . . . estimates of its eventual death toll run into the scores of millions. Stalin's name appears only twice in the book, mentioned briefly for his role as People's Commissar for Nationalities. Unremarkable there on the page, the words "I. V. Djugashvili *(Stalin)*" are like the shadow of a shark passing under the boat. Many of the Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries who are central characters in the narrative will be among Stalin's victims. There's Trotsky, of course, whose wit and sarcasm as an orator Reed admired; he will be assassinated in Mexico. The Bolshevik leaders Zinoviev and Kamenev will be the most famous defen-

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dants executed in the thirties' show trials. Dybenko, Reed's "giant bearded sailor with the placid face," who was the Bolsheviks' Commissar of the Navy, will be shot in 1938. Antonov-Ovseenko, the Commissar of War, whom Reed describes commandeering a taxicab to get to the front and borrowing paper and pencil to write a supply requisition, will have a death of relative dignity. After his arrest in the thirties, Antonov-Ovseenko will entertain his cellmates with stories of the Revolution, and when he is led away to be shot he will distribute his clothes among them, asking that they tell the people he remained a Bolshevik to his last day.

An important scene in the book—indeed, a turning point in the action—comes when the armored-car soldiers meet to decide whether to support the Bolsheviks or remain neutral. The armored-car soldiers are the strongest military force in the city, and without them the Bolsheviks can't hang onto power. Speaker after speaker addresses them, arguing against and for, but the soldiers are undecided. Then N. V. Krylenko, the Bolshevik military leader, stands on an armored car. In a voice cracking with fatigue, he tells the soldiers that the Bolsheviks have achieved the Revolution, that they can bring the country peace, that the fate of the Revolution is now in the soldiers' hands. When he finishes, exhaustion causes him almost to fall. The soldiers vote by moving to one side or another of the hall; almost all of them move to the Bolshevik side.

This same Krylenko will turn up as Chief Prosecutor under Stalin, sneering at and hectoring defendants and sending hundreds of innocent people to their death. Later, Krylenko himself will be arrested. In *The Gulag Archipelago* he will make a brief appearance as a prisoner who for his former arrogance is treated with extra cruelty and humiliation, made to sleep on the floor beneath the lowest bunk in the cell. The prison system will bear him away, to a fate no one knows. Krylenko will be another of the millions whose year of death—1938? 1940?—is only a guess.

It's spooky, too, as you read along, knowing what will happen to the author. Toward the end of the book, Reed goes from Petrograd to Moscow and explores that city to see the effects of revolution. In Red Square, in front of the Kremlin Wall, workers are digging a common grave for five hundred victims of the fighting in Moscow. He goes down into the pit, sees the workers sweating despite the cold. Reed wasn't a man who indulged much in gloomy speculation. Still, the reader may wonder if an intimation of his own fate ever crossed his mind.

A British sculptor who went to Russia in 1920 to sculpt Lenin and Trotsky wrote that the Russians considered *Ten Days That Shook the World* the best book on the Revolution and a national classic, and that they were teaching it in the schools. After Stalin consolidated his power in the late 1920s the book was suppressed, because of the lack of flattering references to him and the prominence it gave to Trotsky. It didn't appear in Russia

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again until the 1960s, when its republication was seen as a sign of the thaw that followed Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism, in his famous Politboro speech against the "cult of personality." Many Russians who read the book at that time learned a version of the events of October 1917 that they had never known before. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the book's Russian readership perhaps has been in decline. Russian friends I asked about it recently say they can't stand even to look at it and find it impossible to read.

Critics have called Reed naïve, or a dupe of the Soviets. Historians have gone through the book and pointed out some factual mistakes. Reed scorned those in Russia and elsewhere who said the Bolsheviks were German agents funded with German money; later information revealed that during the war Bolshevik leaders did indeed meet with representatives of the German government and that the Party received millions of German marks. George F. Kennan, the leading American expert on Russia, wrote that *Ten Days* was sometimes annoying and silly in its political enthusiasm, but added, "Reed's account of the events of that time rises above every other contemporary record for its literary power, its penetration, its command of detail. It will be remembered when all the others have been forgotten."

After *Insurgent Mexico,* Walter Lippmann wrote a favorable but condescending article about Reed in which he described him as a fad follower of socialism, and referred to Reed's gift for self-dramatization, perhaps remembering the attitude-striking, striving schoolboy of their college days. It's possible to see how Reed's politics could seem an affectation taken on just to be different from the clubby types who shunned him. But however he arrived at his political convictions, he was not one to drop them after the point had been made. In Bolshevik circles, a serious putdown was to say that someone "played at revolution." Reed was the kind of man honored by his companions for being headlong and fearless and hard-core. He did not "play" at revolution; what he believed in, he followed through. People who knew Lenin saw Lenin the same way. They spoke of his audacity of mind, his viselike logic, his unswerving dedication. Both Reed and Lenin aroused the romantic imaginations of their admirers, and romance does not go well with half measures and compromise. When I'm in a certain mood, that pedal-to-the-metal quality Reed and Lenin shared seems wonderful and exhilarating; but in the next moment my sanity returns.

Reed's ability to excite admiration did not vanish at his death. In later years, several people wrote novels in which the main character was based on him; Max Eastman's was called *Venture.* Reed's classmate Robert Hallowell wrote a loving obituary and also painted a portrait showing him with windblown hair against a turbulent sky. It hangs in an entry hall of a dorm at Harvard. In 1928 Sergei Eisenstein made a movie of *Ten Days That Shook the World,* and in 1981 Warren Beatty produced, directed, and starred in a movie called *Reds,* which presented Reed and Louise Bryant as well-intentioned, befuddled, sixties-type idealists. A group of alumni from classes just

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after Reed's wanted to get his papers for Harvard, and they persisted in correspondence with Louise Bryant for that purpose up until her death. Their efforts succeeded, and now the papers of America's most famous Communist are in the collection of the wealthiest university in the world.

Among the catastrophes of the twentieth century, the Russian Revolution was a distinctively literary one. The young men and women who gave the revolution its first momentum got inspiration and direction from books. They read Chernyshevsky, they read Herzen, they read Marx, they read Gorky. The young Lenin, mourning his brother after his execution for plotting against the life of the tsar, read Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* because it was a favorite of his brother's. Chernyshevsky "plowed me up more profoundly than anyone else," Lenin later recalled, saying that the book could supply enough energy for an entire lifetime. Very quickly, the state that these book-driven revolutionaries created turned language itself into an unfunny joke. In America, *Ten Days That Shook the World* won a lot of sympathy for the Soviet Union. A study of American Communism found that the book converted more readers to the cause than all other leftist propaganda combined. *Ten Days* is persuasive because it's writing first and propaganda almost accidentally. Like the Hemingway-esque style of *Insurgent Mexico,* the socialist-realist agitprop in *Ten Days* sounds new and unrehearsed, as if the author had just come upon it for the first time.

The fall of the Soviet Union is usually characterized as a victory for capitalism and market economics; that the Soviet Union existed to begin with can also be seen as an indictment. The Russian Revolution occurred in capitalist Europe and wouldn't have been possible without a murderous all-out war between capitalist countries to give it a shove. Russia at the beginning of that century was a country of chronic misrule and great economic inequality, conditions that can be found all over the world all the time. And in 1917, what a chaotic, head-over-heels, multidirectional avalanche those conditions brought down! Any ordinary observer would have kept his distance, if not run away at the first rumbling. But Reed, believing there was order in it, stared at a crucial moment of the Revolution unblinking and head-on, and took out of it a work of reporting that became a permanent part of two national literatures—no small achievement for a romantic young man from Portland, Oregon.

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Judgment

WILLIAM BAER

Having confessed his crime (writing love
poems to the Prince's mistress), the straight
young knight from Venice stood all alone, above
the royal palace court, to hear his fate:
"You have a choice. So listen and decide.
Either: retire to the desert, and take
a vow to forfeit women, wine, and pride,
until you die, as penance for your mistake.
Or second, never write a poem again."
The court was stunned. A duke unsheathed his sword.
But the youth stayed calm. He waited, and then
addressed the court. "God bless your mercy, my lord.
The choice is easy," explained the grateful knight.
"I'll keep my pen, and ride to the desert tonight."

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The Road from Abalak

Heat, Wind, Dust, Fear

PETER CHILSON

Early on Christmas morning I stood with hundreds of people on a roadside in Abalak, a town in southern central Niger, West Africa, on the edge of the Sahara. I remember the peculiar fine dust, like talcum, that arrived on a cool wind and dyed the air a dirty gray. The harmattan, the Saharan winter wind, had been blowing from the northeast since November, hard enough to fill the sky with dust but not strongly enough to carry sand. Fine grit coated everything, including the fatigues of the soldiers who were running about, guns slung across their backs, shouting orders and directing traffic.

I was trying to hitch a ride in a supply convoy of civilian vehicles and heavy trucks that the army escorted twice a week to Agadez, one of the Sahara's oldest cities and long a center of the trans-Saharan caravan trade. Now the city was under a sort of siege. Agadez sits in the traditional territory of Berber nomads, the Tuaregs, who were fighting for a country of their own in the desert. This siege was not so much physical as psychological, rooted in history and the suggestion of threat brought on by the dust that veiled so much—buildings, vehicles, people, even the land itself. In this part of West Africa, the harmattan signals a season of war, a time when attacks are expected on the Agadez road under cover of dust.

The convoy would travel 150 miles up Niger's National Highway 2—an asphalt road, six meters wide, obscured for much of the way by drifting sand. About a hundred vehicles were preparing to depart on this road, and I saw much worth plundering: trucks full of grain, trucks loaded with

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onions, petrol tankers, government cars, private cars, bush taxis. Hausa merchants, women as well as men, walked about in heavy camel's-hair robes. Scattered among the vehicles was an army escort of six white Toyota Land Cruiser pickups with machine guns mounted on the roofs, and a light tank painted desert khaki.

Abalak is an African road town, part farm village, part military base, and after decades of drought it has also become a refugee camp as well. Hausa farming and merchant families, Arab and Tuareg herders and merchants—unable to understand each other's languages—watched one another here in the streets and from the compounds of their baked-mud houses and goatskin tents, living in uneasy mutual dependence on land fast losing its ability to support them.

Here's a cartographer's technicality. Abalak isn't even in the Sahara, but in the north central Sahel, a narrow belt of arid savanna along the Sahara's southern edge, stretching from Senegal on the west coast to the continent's center. The Sahel, what's left of it, is inland West Africa's agricultural heart and an ecological border region (*Sahel* means border in Arabic) where desert and savanna meet in physical single-mindedness. Heat and wind, the Sahara's greatest exports, drive against a flatness whose colors—the gold and brown of sand, the maroon of laterite rock—clash only with those summer days when the sky is brittle blue and the wind blows softer and hotter.

Here's a reality. As an agricultural region, the Sahelian savanna is nearly irrelevant, having been overpowered by the Sahara. The grasses are mostly gone, and so are the trees. Villagers plant dwarf prosopis, a thorny Sahel native known as mesquite in the American Southwest, to shore up eroding washes and to stabilize dunes. Prosopis is often the only visible vegetation. In Abalak it's hard to distinguish desert, the sandy, rocky plains to the north, from the savanna to the south—similar land of only marginal vegetation, where grasses, bushes, acacia, neem, and palm trees are a bit more common. "There's nothing here," wrote a French officer from his post four hundred miles southeast of Abalak in 1944, "but bush and sand."

Across this terrain, wind moves dust and sand with magical power. Sixty years ago in the Libyan Sahara, many hundreds of miles northeast of Niger, German and Allied armies attacked each other under the escort of these storms. And for centuries, West African dust has fallen on Western Europe, in raindrops colored white or red by fine grains of quartz and red jasper that the desert's rare but violent downpours grind off buttes, hillsides, and mountains. Wind does the rest.

Indeed, the wind has done its job so thoroughly that there's little dust left in the Sahara. The light stuff, the actual dust, blew off long ago, leaving 3.5 million square miles of sand and rock laid bare by the wind that blows year-round off the desert onto the Sahel. There the wind picks up half

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a billion tons of dust a year, the Sahel's remaining topsoil, consuming thousands of square miles as the Sahara marches south: a desert's ecological annexation of a savanna.

For centuries, travelers have struggled to describe the singular ability of these lands to rise and swallow them. This is the English explorer James Richardson's description, written in 1846, of a camel caravan navigating the Sahara a few hundred miles south of Tripoli:

> We followed the tracks of the few of our party who had preceded us. . . . But one night of strong wind usually covers up the track, and though the sand does not move in billows, it flies about, first from one side and then the other, and fills up the foot-prints of men and animals. There is no doubt but it requires the most practised eye of the camel-driver to find his way through these regions, and yet, for my life, I could not see that the people experienced difficulty.

Richardson was describing a sandstorm whose heavier particles move in low, dense clouds, usually below the knees, but sometimes at chest level or a bit higher. Sand is too heavy to fly high or stay aloft long. Dust storms are different. They rise to altitudes of fifteen thousand feet, appearing to saturate the atmosphere. A. Starker Leopold, son of the naturalist Aldo Leopold, has clarified the sand-or-dust-storm distinction in his book *The Desert:* "Since dust is so much lighter than sand, the wind can raise huge clouds of it, clouds so dense that in the storm center it is as dark as night."

Harmattan dust blows in on softer, more constant winds, filling the air with a haze for weeks on end. But dense storms of the violence Leopold describes often precede monsoons of the Sahelian summer. Giant cauliflower clouds rumble across the land, churning up sand and dust with a force that makes you think the earth itself is dissolving. Driving rains follow like guerrilla raiders, wiping out crops, filling ravines with rushing water, and then vanishing.

I first experienced such a storm while serving in the Peace Corps in Niger in 1986. From my seat on a bus on Highway 2 near Abalak, I watched dark blue rain clouds form above the brown line of late-afternoon horizon. Then, as if growing fur, the horizon changed to a blurry band, and then to a billowing mass. In open desert, where landmarks are few, African drivers tell direction by reading the color tone of the earth, and by instinct. But dust storms stop even the best drivers. In minutes, the dust overcame our bus and turned afternoon to night. The driver pulled over. When the storm passed, three hours later, real darkness had fallen.

During the nearly five years I spent in Africa, dust became part of my point of view, something to take note of with a glance at the sky throughout each day. After I'd seen just one storm, I couldn't shake that pulsating vision of climate and earth advancing on me like some cosmic army.

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I'd hitched a ride into Abalak on a Toyota minibus the day before the supply convoy was to leave. Both sides of the road through town were crowded with vehicles and with men huddling around small fires. I hung around a long time, talking to drivers and looking for a place to sleep. Finally, late in the evening, a man directed me to a "hotel" on the outskirts of town. It turned out to be a bar in a dusty yard surrounded by cinder-block walls. A boy sold bottles of beer from a damp pit covered with wet burlap. The only customer was a truck driver I'd seen hours earlier by the road beside his rig, an eighteen-wheeler carrying onions. He raised his bottle to me as I entered the bar.

"Very nice coat," he said in French, referring to the heavy nylon windbreaker I was wearing. "Will you give it to me?"

I smiled, set my baggage against the wall, and bought two beers from the boy, one for me and one for the driver. I took a seat across from him on one of many straw mats spread on the ground. We sat with our beers cradled in our crossed legs, arms folded against the cold. He wore a battered brown wool sports jacket over several T-shirts; under my windbreaker I had on a sweater. We both wore cotton turbans around our heads to protect against the wind and dust. He was drunk and had trouble keeping his turban wrapped tightly. We talked about onions and Agadez. I learned that he was Nigerian and was hauling onions from the Kano region. We switched to English, but the conversation kept stalling. He sipped beer and stared at the ground.

"You look worried," I said.

He looked at me and spat in the dirt, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "American?"

I nodded.

"You must be a tourist."

I was making this journey with the hope of writing about the Tuareg rebellion, but if I admitted that openly, I might be removed from the convoy and perhaps arrested. The government didn't like the negative publicity of the war. So I smiled at the driver's surmise and did not object.

"I make this trip four times a year," he said, "and now is the worst time to be on this road." He slapped his upper arms with both hands crossed, making a flapping sound and raising a cloud of dust, as if to check whether the stuff were still there. He shook his head. "They hide in the dust. The rebels could be watching us the whole time, traveling behind the convoy, or in the bush beside the road, and we would never even know."

Weeks earlier, he said, a group of Tuaregs in a white Peugeot station wagon had ambushed part of an Agadez convoy on a day thick with dust. In the haze, no one noticed the car climbing onto the road and entering the convoy near the rear, ahead of a half dozen cars and trucks. The Peugeot appeared as if dust had created it. The occupants wore turbans and the uniforms of Niger's army. The car slowed in order to separate the

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vehicles in the rear from the rest of the convoy. The rebel driver suddenly turned the Peugeot to block the road. The others got out and fired shots in the air and into the lead truck's radiator.

The rebels hurt no one. They stuffed their plunder in the Peugeot and a minibus that they'd commandeered, then disappeared in the dust. They left a few bottles of water for the passengers. An army patrol rescued them hours later.

"How do you know all these details?" I asked.

He glared at me. "How do I know? How?" He touched his chest with the open palm of his hand. "Because that driver is my friend!"

I shrugged. "Sorry. Of course, you know the road well." I paused a moment, remembering that I still had no ride to Agadez. "Do you think you might let me ride with you?" I asked.

He frowned and raised a finger, shaking his head. "No, no! On another road, yes, but here you will be too much trouble. I am sorry, no." He hung his head. I didn't push the matter.

For centuries, Tuaregs have roamed the Sahara, surviving off the trade of camels, goats, slaves, and from piracy. They would appear out of the dust like gritty spirits—men distinguished by their loose robes and tightly wound turbans, often colored indigo blue—to extort their needs from camel caravans and lone travelers. Or, for a price, they would escort a caravan to protect its safety.

Only a few caravans, remnants of the ancient trade between North Africa and the sub-Saharan lands, still cross the Sahara. Traditionally, caravans transported cloth, precious metals, and perfumes to the south, returning with black African slaves and salt. To plunder that traffic outright would have meant killing off a means of support in a land of meager resources: desert suicide. So the Tuaregs have lived by a balance of guerrilla war and petty thievery that gradually bled caravans and other tribes of food and livestock. Outright plunder and murder happened more rarely.

Tuaregs didn't attack openly, preferring instead to mix with their prey in small numbers at first, posing as harmless herdsmen and planting rumors of discontent. They let fear work from within, an ideal tactic for attacking large caravans that customarily spread out into small groups with no coordinated means of defense. This vulnerability exasperated James Richardson, who in 1846 traveled by caravan a third of the way across the Sahara into what is now western Libya. Near the start of the trip, just south of Tripoli, he described in his journal how the caravan was organized. "Each group is its own sovereign master," he wrote, "and will have its own way."

But Tuareg bands also scuttled well-defended French military expeditions, which they attacked aggressively. The French, after all, threatened the nomad way of life through military action and pressure to take up the relatively sedentary work of farming. The Tuaregs challenged France's hold on inland West Africa for fifty years, until they suffered a decisive

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defeat near Agadez in 1919. They've been warring on and off ever since.

After I left Niger in 1993, several Tuareg groups made peace with the governments of Niger and Mali, but other groups refused to negotiate. The culture of piracy and fear lives on. The U.S. State Department, in a consular information sheet issued last year, warned that the region around Agadez and the Aïr Mountains had "experienced increased criminal activity by armed bandits. In these attacks, groups of foreign travelers, including Americans, have been robbed of vehicles, cash and belongings and left stranded in the remote desert. The government of Nigeria is taking steps to address this problem."

"This is the desert," the driver in the Abalak bar had told me. "Tuaregs will always own this road."

About midnight the truck driver stumbled off to sleep in the cab of his vehicle. The bar owner let me spread my bedroll on a mat in the compound. I lay awake a long time, thinking of James Richardson atop his camel, cursing the wind, dust, and heat, a man well aware of what a fine target his caravan made as it approached the Aïr Mountains northeast of Agadez.

Back on the road early in the morning, I couldn't find the driver and his truck. He'd probably been moved to the rear of the convoy, or had turned back. I tried to buy passage to Agadez in one of the Peugeot station wagons lined up along the road. They were bush taxis, but the drivers wouldn't take my money. A "European passenger," they said, made their cars better targets for the rebels. But the driver of a government bus, a white and orange Mercedes, sold me a seat.

The challenge of getting to Agadez, and my growing worries about rebel Tuaregs, made me feel a sort of kinship with Richardson—another traveler in fear. In March 1850, Richardson was forty-four and newly married when he attempted a second Sahara crossing. He left his wife in Tripoli and set out for the unexplored Lake Chad region, where he hoped to find the "source and causes" of the Arab slave trade so that England might destroy it. Richardson, an evangelical minister, had made the abolition of slavery his life's work. A year and more than a thousand miles later he died, having crossed the desert and reached the Sahel, but not Lake Chad. What killed him, apparently, were heat exhaustion and the climate's gradual wearing on his health. And, I believe, the journey's psychological impact.

Richardson covered much of the distance on camelback in an Arab merchant caravan. His journals—published by his wife in 1853, under the title *Narrative of a Mission to Central Africa*—include nervous observations of landscape, climate, and Tuaregs, as if he felt it might be perilous to ignore any of them. Not far south of Tripoli, Richardson wrote, "the caravan was in motion fourteen entire hours, over heavy sand, with hot wind breathing fiercely on it." Farther south, he marveled at a "dust devil"—"a column of

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dust carried into the heavens in a spiral formed by wind, whilst all around was perfect calm." Weeks later he stabbed a thermometer into the sand under blasts of the late summer *gheblee,* called by the Arabs the "hot wind," and measured 130 degrees. He observed how camel drivers found the desert route by looking for camel dung, "which rolls about the surface of the sand." Further on, he wrote of "clouds of sand-dust. . . . The fine particles cover and pervade everything, and getting between the skin and the flannel, produce an irritation like the pricking of needles." All the while he watched for Tuaregs, "easily distinguished by their habit of wearing a . . . muffler, with which they conceal their mouths [from dust] and all the lower part of their face. This custom gives them a strangely mysterious appearance."

Richardson thought he'd bought the caravan's security in the Saharan town of Ghāt (now in Libya, on the Algerian border, five hundred miles north of Agadez) by hiring an escort of Kailouee Tuareg tribesman—only to find the caravan threatened by Tuaregs of other tribes. Small groups tailed them, begging for food as the caravan neared the Aïr Mountains. "Three mysterious Haghars [Tuareg tribesmen] still continued to follow us," Richardson wrote, "declaring that they had no evil intentions, but were merely poor wayfarers. . . ." The three disappeared, but were replaced by a different group that kept watch over the caravan. "When it was nearly dusk, five mounted men made their appearance, two of them leading six empty camels. . . . I treated them to supper—in fact, I am obliged to feed all strangers. . . . During the night these strange fellows disappeared. . . . About two in the morning the Kailouees, wishing to start early, began to bustle about in the dark, in order to collect their camels. They could not find any of them."

The camels were gone. The next day Haghar Tuaregs surrounded the caravan and extorted payment under threat of attack.

Here's another way to view the land and its problems. Environmental groups and foreign-aid workers blame West African dust on the actions of people—a thousand years of deforestation and overgrazing. The United Nations has pinpointed Africa's growing deserts, the Sahara especially, as the continent's gravest environmental threat. The experts have a point, but there's another side to the issue. The Sahara, once a lush plateau, is a natural force at least one hundred thousand years old—there are scientists who believe the Sahara began growing as much as two million years ago—and no one really knows when or how things began to change, or to what extent human activity can fairly be blamed. What we do know is that the soils that the hot Saharan winds rob from the Sahel account for more than half the dust in the global atmosphere. Those fine grains of quartz have settled as far west as New Mexico, sixty-six hundred miles away. Geological Africa mixes with the American West.

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A balance of physics and chemistry is at work here, the right combination of vulnerable soils and wind, driven by solar heat—pure airborne energy that helps power the air into a frenzy. Or, as the English meteorologist John G. Lockwood writes in *Causes of Climate,* "The sun drives all the meteorological and climatological wind systems and these continually dissipate energy mainly by friction at the ground surface."

I saw this point demonstrated when I visited Niger's government meteorology center at the national airport in the capital, Niamey. The walls were plastered with ever-changing maps of West Africa, white posterboard with dramatic black arrows that revealed wind direction, temperature, thunderstorm patterns during the monsoon season, and the year-round movement of dust, all measured against the position of the sun.

Hamza Ibrahim, the center's director, bluntly translated the charts for me. "The sun causes these winds," he began. "One energy source we don't lack here in Africa is the sun."

Along Highway 2 from Abalak you can see the evidence of that natural power. The wind shapes dunes in stars and crescents with knife-edge ridges and rounded domes. But all this vanishes in dust that imprisons the landscape behind a shroud, creating open terrain that is much more difficult, if not impossible, to navigate. Dust collects in the wrinkles of your clothes, frosts your hair, coats the inside of your mouth and lungs, disguises your face. To survive, you develop a sense that much is not what it appears to be.

Wind, dust, and heat, in a vast sameness of landscape, are the germs of what the French have called *la Soudanite,* a nervous state that is thought to have afflicted colonial officers in Africa. The French recommended that men serve no more than two years in the West African interior to avoid mental collapse. The ailment, very likely, is what the historian Douglas Porch calls in *Conquest of the Sahara,* his history of the French in the Sahara, a "way to pass off . . . excesses of behavior brought on by the African climate."

I'm talking now about murder, and the complicity of landscape and climate. Some believe that those two factors alone can trigger homicidal mania. In 1900, colonial authorities investigated, posthumously, two French officers who had laid waste to a five-hundred-mile strip of what is now southern Niger. The previous year, captains Paul Voulet and Charles Chanoine had led a force of six hundred African conscripts on what was to have been a geographic expedition. Instead they razed villages and cities. Villagers welcomed them, offering supplies and guides, only to be massacred. In July 1899, the African soldiers mutinied and killed the two officers near a village 180 miles south of Abalak, leaving France with much to explain, both at home and to the African population it had pledged to enlighten.

"Blood was spilled . . . and many villages . . . were burned," wrote an officer who came upon the expedition's swath in May 1899. "I can't understand the causes of such harsh measures."

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In his journal, Voulet had complained of wind and dust, lack of water, and fear of Tuareg attack (though none occurred). The closest thing to an explanation finally came with the publication, in 1931, of the journals of two officers sent to arrest the renegade captains. The book's anonymous preface blames "*la biskrite, la Saharite, la Soudanite, l'Africanite*. . . . The name is of little importance. . . . It is this state of absolute agitation with so many small causes that produces such regrettable effects."

The soldiers marshaling the Abalak supply convoy positioned the government bus ten vehicles from the lead truck. I took the only seat left, just behind the driver. The passengers were mostly civil servants and their families traveling to homes and jobs in Agadez and beyond. I hoped a government bus might be the safest vehicle to ride in, but I could also think of reasons why it might be the most dangerous. Civil servants and merchants, after all, carry money and make good hostages.

As we started to roll, I watched the dust swallow cars and trucks in front of us. It was as if we were driving into a cotton swab. A Land Cruiser escort followed us. Eight soldiers sat in back, legs hanging over the sides of the rear bed, guns poking the air. They had wrapped their heads in turbans. One soldier stood behind the cab, manning a mounted machine gun. Dust blew in sheets across the road, a geological migration that reminded me of the powers bush taxi drivers attribute to dust. They talk of giant swirling dust devils patrolling the roads in hotter weather.

To meteorologists, dust devils sometimes signal that conditions are right for dust storms. The whirlwinds burst from the soil when extremely hot ground heats and fuels the air layer above it so that the air becomes unstable and rises, meeting cooler air above. This cooler, heavier layer of air flows downward to displace more of the hot air. The result is chaotic energy that sucks up dust as the hot air rises. The hotter the patch of ground, the more powerful the dust devil. Some rise to heights of one thousand feet, spinning at sixty miles per hour with the power to pick up and fling small mammals.

A driver once told me he'd seen a vision one windy afternoon on the road to Agadez: a tall, thin woman in flowing white cloth. Her body seemed to extend endlessly into the atmosphere, swaying and twisting in a serpentine way that made him think she was about to lunge and attack, like a sort of spiritual tornado. She was, of course, both spiritual and meteorological: a vengeful being, on the one hand, and a whirling centrifugal column of dust particles, on the other—pressure gradients, sparring drafts of cold and hot air crashing together from above and below and spinning outward in a vortex whose inner workings scientists have never completely understood.

The driver assured me that he'd seen the ghostly woman's face and that her mouth was open in a scream. She didn't attack, but it was weeks before the driver could face the road again.

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This is the rarest kind of dust devil, because of its size, and the most dangerous on the road. To drivers the dust devil is psychopathic, an agent of evil that has neither top nor bottom and blinds when it strikes, as if a hand has suddenly gripped the car's entire frame. Bush taxi drivers maneuver wildly to avoid such dust devils. I've been in cars that have struck them, and have felt them grab hold, shake the car with indignant fury, and leave little cracks in the windows from flying pebbles. The Hausa word for wind, *iska,* is the same as the word for ghost. Drivers have a name for sections of road prone to accidents: *hanya mai iska,* which means "road of the wind" or "haunted road."

On the bus I tried to ignore such thoughts by sleeping. At noon the convoy stopped for the midday Muslim prayer. Off the road I stood on a landscape at war, looking off in one direction and then another, hands dug into my pockets as sand broke about my ankles.

I watched travelers, their bodies blurred by dust, spreading prayer rugs on the sand and praying prostrate before Mecca. The men prayed in front and the women behind, while children ran about laughing, and babies watched quizzically from blankets their mothers had laid out beside them. Most of the people in the convoy were Hausa, longstanding enemies of the Tuaregs, lords of the dunes who for centuries had raided Hausa villages to take slaves and foodstuffs.

Miles back, we'd passed three wrecked petrol tankers that rebels had attacked on the road months earlier. Through the dust I could see that explosions had blackened the asphalt. Sand drifts crept up the sides of the metal corpses. As we passed army checkpoints—a common feature on Niger roads in peacetime or war—I felt a tension uncommon farther south, away from the conflict. There were more soldiers up here. They were Niger's best troops, younger and stronger, in smart fatigues and boots. They had automatic rifles, wore field packs, and looked ready to fight.

This was the closest I'd been to war. My awareness of the journey's risk, of the history of the conflict, had made me jumpy and irritable. Now I couldn't even make notes. I thought of Richardson's frustrated declaration against banditry, written in the desert northeast of Agadez: the region, he wrote, "abounds with thieves, and we must now always keep watch."

At the roadside, waiting for prayers to end, a soldier smoked. One stood at the mounted gun. Six others surrounded the bus, staring into the desert with their guns. Then a peculiar event occurred. Down the road a white Peugeot pickup popped out of the haze. The truck raced up the roadbed, across the asphalt, and bounded back into the dust. Dust had almost perfectly camouflaged the truck, but not quite well enough. Soldiers jumped and shouted, and the Land Cruiser took off after the Peugeot so fast the soldiers had to run to get in, their buddies pulling them up by the trousers as if onto a life raft. Passengers cheered. Some shouldered children to watch. "Rebels will die today," a man said. I hoped the pickup's driver was

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only a farmer hauling wood. Not unusual in Niger, where the few who can afford a vehicle move people and goods at a price and without permits. They would flee at the sight of soldiers—scared soldiers who might shoot before investigating.

In seconds the escort dissolved in the haze. The cheering and talking trailed off, as if everyone realized a decoy had lured away our protection. Behind the bus, I could see nothing in the haze, but I heard voices and the idling motors of the rest of the convoy: sounds suspended in dust.

"You are afraid?" a man asked me in French. He was a big man, tall and heavy, his body protected under a camel's-hair cloak. He wore a white turban and sandals.

"Yes, I am," I said. "Aren't you?"

"Why, no, we are well defended." He laughed. "The rebels would not dare attack us." I stared off and he walked away. I sat in the sand and looked into the dust. We might as well have been sitting in total darkness.

After an hour we heard an engine approach. The escort roared out of the dust and stopped, facing the bus. Our driver had a brief shouted exchange in Hausa with the soldier at the mounted gun. The driver shrugged and waved his arm at the passengers. Time to push on.

On board, I asked the driver what had happened.

"They lost the truck in the dust," he said.

At 6:00 P.M. we made Agadez, a city that James Richardson bypassed in his hurry to get to Lake Chad to meet the German explorer Heinrich Barth. But Richardson fell ill and stopped in a village a few days' journey from Lake Chad. He died there in delirium on March 4, 1851. Barth made it to Lake Chad, and learned of Richardson's death weeks after the fact. He traveled to the village to collect the Englishman's journals and carry them to the British consul in Tripoli. "Mr. Richardson could never bear the sun," he wrote to the consul. "I think this to be the chief reason of his death."

In Agadez I stayed at the Hotel Kaosen, named for a fierce Tuareg leader who finally surrendered to the French months after the end of World War I. But I spent most of three days at the police commissariat trying to convince the commandant that I was a harmless traveler, not a white mercenary hired to help the Tuaregs.

The commandant told me to leave the city.

I returned to southern Niger in a much smaller convoy, with two escort vehicles, that left Agadez on a clear, sunny day. "Don't worry," a soldier assured me. "There's no dust for rebels to hide in."

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Tono, Japan—December

KEVIN M. SIMMONDS

Crows against snow.
This must have been written before,
Perhaps flowering austerely in an ancient haiku
Or yellowing terribly in an encased Portuguese diary.

Beauty beaten on these anvils
Against a sky
Falling apart.
Black anchors.
Crows hawking,
Leaning generously toward God
And me.

A moment's match struck to dark flames,
Pushing the light from itself.
Pushing the light from its wings.

Kevin M. Simmonds is a musician and a poet. His work has appeared in *Nimrod, Black Bear Review,* and *Beyond the Frontier: African-American Poetry for the 21st Century.*

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Trench Town Rock

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

Faced with the inexorable advance of the forces of Cromwell, which invaded Jamaica in 1655, the Spanish colonists freed their fifteen hundred slaves, who disappeared into the wild. In the turbulent centuries to come, they would reappear under the name Maroons (derived from the term *cimarrón*, meaning fugitive slave), enveloped in an aura of indomitability. From this fierce lineage Marcus Garvey was born in 1887, apostle of "negritude" and the African American diaspora. Without Garvey, the cult of Rastafarianism would never have transcended its Jamaican borders; without his teachings, Bob Marley as we know him would never have existed.

It is to Marcus Garvey that the prophetic warning is attributed (though historians dispute it): "Look to Africa, for the crowning of a Black king; he shall be the redeemer." Years later, in 1928, Ras Tafari Makonnen assumed the title of Negus (king of kings) of Ethiopia and was soon crowned emperor. In Jamaica, on the trees and roofs of villages and on the walls of ghettos, devout reproductions of the face of Haile Selassie and the green, red, and gold of the Ethiopian flag began to appear. The faithful of the new religion were of humble origin, and their doctrine was simple: Jah (syncope of Jehovah) would lead his people back to Ethiopia at a secret hour, bringing them out of Babylon (the world dominated by white men, vice, and cruelty). That moment was drawing near, because Jah had been incarnated in the monarch of Addis Ababa. The Rastas spurned alcohol, tobacco, meat, seafood, and salt and obeyed the Levitican injunction (25:5) not to cut their hair, beards, or nails. Their rite of communion and

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basic ceremony was the smoking of ganja (marijuana), the sacred plant ennobled by King Solomon, from whose tomb it sprang.

The first time that Bob Nesta Marley saw a Rasta was in Nine Miles, a hamlet in the parish of St. Ann, where he was born in 1945. Son of a black woman and the white man who married her but abandoned her immediately afterward, the mulatto boy listened raptly to the medieval stories of Prester John with which the village wise man, an inspired teller of tales, entertained his listeners. The appearance one day of a man with a nest of snakes on his head and a stormy look in his eye, a man who seemed to float rather than to walk, frightened the child who dreamed of him that night. His conversion to Rastafarianism would come much later.

Nine Miles must not have changed much since then. It is still a very poor village, at the summit of a steep mountain range, which one reaches by following an extremely long, winding, and precipitous path. The wooden shack where Bob Marley was born doesn't exist anymore. The faithful are rebuilding it in cement, and they've planted a clump of ganja at the threshold. His tomb is higher up, on another peak that must be scaled on foot, and from which, I'm told, on the black day of the burial one could see a winding column of mourners many kilometers long. Here is the stone where he used to sit to meditate and compose, and here, his guitar. A tapestry embroidered by Ethiopians adorns the shrine, which must be entered barefoot, and from which hang, like votive offerings, photographs, newspaper clippings, little flags, and even the hood ornament of Marley's car, a BMW, his favorite because its initials united those of his name and that of the Wailers, the musical group with which he rose to fame.

The Rasta acting as our guide is taking communion, and a North American couple who hitched a ride in our van are partaking as well. The visit includes a walk through a large field of sacred plants. Since marijuana is in theory prohibited in Jamaica, I ask the communion taker whether he has ever had problems with the police. He shrugs his shoulders: "Sometimes they come and pull the plants up. So what? They grow back again. They're natural, right?" The prohibition is a formality. A few days before, at a reggae bash, or open-air concert in Ocho Rios, ganja was sold loose or rolled in spliffs in plain sight, and vendors hawked it like soda or beer. And I don't think I've ever been in a public place in Jamaica without being offered some, or seeing someone—and not just the Rastas—smoking it.

But it's not at Nine Miles, or at the mansion on Hope Road in Kingston, which his producer bought for him at the height of his career and which now houses a museum dedicated to his memory, where clues to Bob Marley must be sought. The place to look is the slum neighborhood of Trench Town on the western edge of the Jamaican capital, since it was on its violent and spiritual streets that he spent his childhood and youth,

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where he became a Rasta and an artist, and where even now the social ferment of his philosophy and music can be breathed. The flies and the mounds of garbage, the motley collections of odds and ends with which the poor have built their tumbledown homes, are the same as those of any Third World slum. The difference is that here, besides filth, hunger, and violence, everywhere one turns one catches whiffs of that "religiosity in a primal state" that Claudel glimpsed in the poetry of Rimbaud. It emanates from the bearded face of the Lion of Judah and from the Abyssinian colors that crop up on planks, gates, and corrugated metal and on the Merovingian caps in which the Rastas gather up their dreadlocks when they play soccer. As a boy, before the guru Mortimer Planner converted him and sent him down the mystical path that he would follow to the end, the Bob Nesta Marley who made himself known on these streets as a gang member, soccer player, and idler must have been a kind of Rimbaud: angel and demon, charming and coarse, crude and brilliant.

Like the Rastafarian cult, reggae is forged of the sweat and blood of Trench Town: mixed up in it are the atavistic rhythms of the tribes from which the Rastas' ancestors were snatched (the wall around the neighborhood is a reminder of the slave market to which they were brought), the accumulated suffering and rage of centuries of servitude and oppression, a messianic hope born out of a naïve reading of the Bible, nostalgia for a mythical Africa cloaked in sumptuous fantasies of Eden, and a desperate, narcissistic eagerness to find and lose oneself in music.

Bob Marley didn't invent reggae. By the time the Wailers recorded their first albums in the sixties in Kingston's rustic Studio One, it was already being promoted by the Skatalites and other Jamaican bands, and had been established as the country's most popular music, despite the resistance of the authorities, who saw in the lyrics of the songs an incitement to rebellion and crime—but Marley lent it his unmistakable personal stamp and gave it the dignity of religious rite and political gospel. The poetry that he infused it with moved his compatriots, because in it they recognized their torments, the thousand and one injustices of life in Babylon, while also finding in it positive and persuasive reasons to struggle against adversity, to see themselves as the chosen ones of Jah, a people about to pass the long test and enter the promised land, a people for whom redemption was imminent.

The music intoxicated them because it was their own traditional music, enriched with modern rhythms from America: rock, jazz, calypso, and hymns. The language Bob Marley spoke to them was the Jamaican patois, indecipherable to unseasoned ears, and his subjects were their quarrels, passions, and feuds, wrapped up in tenderness, mysticism, and pity. The word "authentic" has a dangerous ring when applied to the work of an artist: is there such a thing as authenticity? Isn't it just a simple technical problem for any creator who knows his craft? For Bob Marley it never was:

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at least not after 1968, when, as a result of his talks with Mortimer Planner, he converted definitively to the Rastafarian religion, pouring his vast faith and his mystical love of street life, his messianic dream as well as his musical knowledge, his passionate religious zeal and the dense jungle lament of his voice into the songs he composed.

This is why he was the only one, out of all the talented composers and artists of the sixties and seventies, who was not just inspired and original but also entirely authentic. He resisted all temptations, even life, the most beguiling, preferring to die at the age of thirty-six rather than allow the amputation of a cancerous toe, because his religion forbade it. It is true that he died a very wealthy man—he left thirty million dollars—but he enjoyed very little of his fortune. When one visits the house on Hope Road, the only indulgence he permitted himself when his sudden fame made him rich, one notes how meager its luxury was compared with what any half-successful singer can afford today.

In the glory of his last years as well as in the poverty of his early years, his only joy was the dust and debris of Trench Town: kicking a soccer ball around, immersing himself in a mysterious introspection from which he would return to the world either euphoric or in tears, scrawling a song in a school notebook, exploring a melody as he strummed his guitar, or swallowing the bittersweet smoke of his ganja cigar. He was generous and even prodigal with his friends and enemies, and the happiest day of his life was the day he was able to use his money to help the relatives of the ousted Haile Selassie, the despot he believed was God. When he visited Africa he discovered that the continent was far from being the land of salvation for blacks that he had exalted in his credo and his songs, and from then on, he became less concerned with "negritude" and more ecumenical, and his pacifist preaching and calls for spirituality were more intense.

One doesn't have to be religious to realize that without religion, life would be infinitely emptier and grimmer for the poor and downtrodden, and that societies have the religions they require. Nearly thirty years ago, when I discovered that a son of mine and a group of his friends from school had become practitioners of the faith, I hated the picturesque theological syncretisms of the Rastas, their marijuana communions, their horrible dietary laws and matted locks. But on the sad streets of Trench Town, or amid the poverty and neglect of the villages of the parish of St. Ann, the faith that for my son and his friends was doubtless a passing fashion, a fickle extravagance of privileged youth, seemed to me a moving bid for a spiritual life, a bid against moral disintegration and human injustice. I ask forgiveness of the Rastas for what I once thought about them, and, along with my admiration for their music, I proclaim my respect for the ideas and beliefs of Bob Marley.

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The Harpsichord on the Mountain

MERRILL JOAN GERBER

Because my husband had some years earlier taught in Florence for his university, we decided to return and live there *senza gli studenti* for a month to see the city on our own. My husband, who was a lover of early music and had built his own harpsichord many years before, had been urged by his musical friends to look up a famous American harpsichordist who lived in Florence. The man was known to have several rare historical instruments; he had been cordial to other amateur players from the United States who had visited him there. We took his phone number with us, but I knew it would take time for my husband to get up the courage to call him. He could not be rushed in such matters.

As soon as we were settled in our apartment, though, we did visit the workshop of a restorer of old instruments. She was a gracious woman who welcomed us into one of those crumbling street-front doorways and led us through passageways of ancient stone till the hallway opened out into a brightly lit workshop, where two other women were bent over harpsichords and pianofortes. Adjoining the workshop was a small but elegant concert hall whose walls were covered with likenesses of Bach. The owner gladly showed us her instruments in progress, and she, too, urged my husband to call the famous harpsichordist who lived near the Porta Romana.

We had many other things we wanted to do in Florence. My husband knew more Italian than I did, but I could manage the basics—shopping for food ("Una fetta di prosciutto cotto, per favore") and clothing ("Posso

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avere un po' di sconto?"). With the help of a friend who knew an agent, we had rented two rooms in the Palazzo Pucci, a five-hundred-year-old apartment house on Via Ricasoli in *il centro* of Florence. If I looked out our third-floor living room window to the left, I could see the bell tower of the Duomo two blocks away. To the right was the Accademia, where Michelangelo's *David* was perched on a pedestal so high that in order to see his face, one had to focus first upon his genitals and then look upward.

The day we visited the Accademia, a girl fainted from the apparently unbearable beauty of the statue above her. A chair was brought for her, and her companion, a much older man, stood behind her chair and from time to time patted her face. Each time she opened her eyes and raised them to David's face, she'd swoon again, her eyes rolling up into her head. Her companion continued to hold her face between his hands. For a moment I had a desire to swoon against my husband and have him bring me to. I'd read about this fainting syndrome, common in Florence—caused by an excess of art and beauty—but I'd never experienced it. If I stayed too long in a museum, I would get hungry and begin to imagine an Italian pizza, uncut on a plate, thin-crusted, perhaps *quattro stagioni* or *prosciutto e funghi,* and art would flee from my mind.

Though we'd been jubilant at the location of our rooms, we'd forgotten that any apartment overlooking a street in the center of Florence would constantly be filled with the deafening buzz and roar of *motorini.* At certain hours the noise of the scooters reached such levels that my husband and I could not speak to one another without shouting.

"How do Italians stand it?" I screamed to him. He was sitting in the enormous living room about three inches from the television, trying to improve his Italian by listening to a quiz show. He didn't hear me. He had a blanket over his head. It was nearly the end of October and the weather was turning cold. Italians did not use heat in their homes till the first of November, unless an emergency weather situation called forth a decree from the government. I was sitting at an antique desk wearing sweater and coat. I was trying to type on my computer, but my fingers were too chilled to move accurately over the keys. I didn't know yet if I was enjoying myself in Italy, though when I sent e-mails home, I thought it sounded impressive to write our grown children: *We are living in a palace with 17th century oil paintings of the Pucci family hanging on the walls. Antiques are in every cabinet. The marchesa Pucci has an office downstairs from which she controls the family empire: textiles, wine, and clothing designed by Emilio Pucci (her famous and dead husband). The shop right next to this building sells Pucci clothing—I priced a handkerchief with a Pucci design, it cost $65. God forbid we should spill wine on our Pucci tablecloth; we have signed away our lives to leave everything exactly as we found it.*

Pucci, Gucci, I really didn't know one from the another. At home I shopped in thrift shops as a form of entertainment. I liked to browse through the items among which other people had lived (and died). I was

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not impressed by designer clothes, and in fact had a low opinion of the elegant, aristocratic Emilio Pucci, who, from what I'd read, was in love with himself and spent too much time away from his young wife having dalliances with other women. From a book I'd read about him at home I had photocopied certain pages in the hope that one day I could have a chat with the marchesa and show her pictures of herself at her wedding, of herself standing on the roof of this very building (with the great Duomo in the background) in the blush of her first love. One photo showed Emilio Pucci mounted on a black steed, in a black velvet cape and black boots, about to lead off the pageant of "*calcio* in costume," as imposing and threatening as Mozart's Commendatore.

The marchesa—now a woman of about sixty—was guarded by two employees, one a bulldog-faced matron, the other an eighteen-year-old beauty named Sabrina with blond hair falling in delicate tendrils about her Botticellian face. These women worked in an office on the first floor of our building. The marchesa worked in another office opposite theirs. I knew that at the sound of the *ascensore* descending from the floors above (those freezing rooms that the marchesa rented to Americans for astronomical prices), Sabrina and the bulldog woman would rush into the hall to prevent anyone from attempting to walk into the garden at the rear of the house and thus pass the open door of the marchesa's office. We lived in fact in a fortress: the front door so thick and heavy I had to turn the key and push with my shoulder to enter the inner chamber, which was itself like an empty, dimly lit prison cell. To get beyond it, through the floor-to-ceiling bars and to the elevator, I needed a second key. A third key opened our apartment door.

Sabrina, who handled the tenants, knew almost no English, so we made much use of pantomime. I tried to tell her that the pots in our tiny kitchen had no covers. Since all the pots (dented and nearly useless) had metal handles, I needed a pot holder. And since each room had only one electrical outlet, I also needed an extension cord—otherwise it was impossible to turn on the living room light, the TV, and my laptop computer at once. The beautiful girl nodded her head and smiled and indicated that all would be taken care of. I had no sense that she understood anything I'd said, and when I found a light bulb at my door the next day, I was certain.

Our apartment had one huge living room, one small bedroom, one tiny kitchen, and one infinitesimal bathroom—which was at the far end of the living room and seemed to have been carved out of the huge blocks of stone that made up the building. The shower enclosure was of cracked and peeling plaster, but the shower handles were gold. There was no shower door or curtain, so water sprayed all over the floor and walls. The towels were always damp and smelled of mildew. There was no way to get them dry—no clothesline to hang them on, no heated radiators to drape them over. The apartment generally smelled like a dirty dishrag.

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I worried about how much money we were spending. Each time I sent an e-mail on my computer, the *scatti* ticked by (a counter measured how many minutes I used the phone). Someone had told me that if I used the phone before 6:30 A.M., my charges would be much cheaper. I'd often get up at dawn, run through the freezing living room with a blanket wrapped around my shoulders, sit down at the antique desk, and log on to my e-mail server. I'd write my daughters the news of the day: *Yesterday evening we had ossobuco for dinner, and later, as we walked across the Arno, we saw a mime on the Ponte Vecchio. He was robed in a Roman toga, spraypainted silver, and he stood as still as a statue for perhaps fifteen minutes while people came up and dropped coins in the silver bowl at his feet. Then, very slowly, he'd raise his arm, as one waking from the dead, to thank those who made contributions. On our way home, we stopped at a profumeria, where Daddy bought me earplugs. When the girl brought out foam rubber plugs, Daddy asked her if they didn't have something more "forte" (he indicated the "motos" going by)—and she found us a box of pink wax earplugs. We paid $9 for them! I hope they work tonight. Our bed has two blankets on it—one made of wool with a Pucci label on it, and one that seems to be an animal skin of some kind, heavy as lead, with fur on one side, smooth like leather on the other. It smells a hundred years old. A cabinet beside our bed, made of wood, has a pull-out drawer with a chamber pot in it! We are living here in the Middle Ages. Yesterday I hoped to meet the marchesa and brought down some pages I'd photocopied from a book about her. She heard me ask her assistant if I might give them to her and slammed her office door against me. She is clearly not interested in Italian-American relations. I have heard that her life is very sad, that she lost a son in a car accident, and that her heart was broken by the womanizing of her famous husband. I am so lucky to have married Daddy. He can be found every night in front of the TV with a blanket over his head, so I always know where he is.*

As a personal protest against the prices in the Pucci shop next door, I took the bus to the outskirts of Florence, where we had once lived, and where I'd often visited a little *mercato usato*—a thrift shop. A woman was just locking up the shop for the day. I recognized her and called out "Paola!" In a moment she was embracing me, her face alight with welcome. She unlocked the door and invited me in even though the sign on the shop said *Chiuso.* Inside, the tiny store was crammed with clothing of every sort, some items hanging up high, some folded in little cubbyholes, some piled in plastic baskets and labeled *Donna, Uomo, Bambini, Camicie, Vestiti.* Winter coats were 10,000 lire ($7). Everything else was a dollar or two. But on this day Paola pointed out to me an iridescent blouse hanging in the window, a garment made of a glowing purple knit shot through with silver threads. She took the blouse off the hanger and held it up. The label read Gucci. The real thing! "*Aah, bella.*" She handed it to me. "*Un regalo.*" A gift, for coming to see her. We hugged once more. She stuffed into a bag other presents as well: a silk scarf, a leather belt, a sweater with Chinese acrobats

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embroidered on it, a battery-run radio/alarm clock whose directions, in Italian, I would never decipher. We embraced a final time when I left. I smiled to myself all the way home. I was certain that today I loved Italy. But when the bus-control police boarded the bus, locked the doors, and demanded to see everyone's ticket in order to catch people trying to ride free, then I hated Italy.

I returned to the Pucci Palace with my Gucci blouse. That night my husband and I walked to the piazza in front of the Duomo, where I bought a piece of jewelry from an Indian tradesman who had set up a stand with bits of glass and tin resembling jewelry. I chose a mother-of-pearl (plastic) dolphin on a silver (tin) chain for $3. It beautifully matched the silver threads in the Gucci blouse.

After we had dinner of pesto and wine at one of the trattorias beyond the piazza, we walked to the Lutheran church on the other side of the river to hear a Bach organ concert. We had been on the lookout for harpsichord concerts; one was advertised on fliers announcing a medieval costume drama, handed out on the Ponte Vecchio by young women dressed in red velvet gowns. But my husband thought the price was too high for a performance that was unlikely to feature authentic historical instruments.

Only a few were attending the organ concert. At the first chords of Bach, I felt the music coming up and into my body through the wooden pews. There was nothing on the walls of the church, no bleeding Christ, no saints under glass, not one gold-leaf pulpit or pietà or burning rank of candles. We heard only Bach's godly music singing through the thundering pipes. The organist sat at a keyboard high above the pews, his back to the backs of the audience. He played as if he were bodiless, or at least as if the body he inhabited were of no consequence to him. When he had played the final notes, he took no bows and gave no encores. He disappeared and left only the vibrations reverberating in our bones.

The night was cold when we got out; it had rained. We crossed the Arno and paused to watch the streetlights ride over the ripples of the current. A couple was kissing a few feet away. Lovers were kissing all over Florence. I had taken a whole roll of film of nothing but lovers kissing—at bus stops, over plates of pasta, outside the *rosticceria,* inside the *gelateria.* I sometimes wished my husband would have an impulse to kiss me in a public place, but I'd known him since I was fifteen. He wasn't likely to satisfy such a fantasy.

I had a sense, as we approached our doorway on Via Ricasoli, that a man was following us, but not on the narrow sidewalk. He was walking slightly behind us in the middle of the street. When we got to our doorway I put my key in the lock, and at that moment the man darted between the scooters parked on the street and rang the lowest doorbell on the wall just beside me. The streetlight reflected off his black leather

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pants. He stood, breathing hard, right behind me. I knew at once he didn't belong there, that the bell he pressed rang only in the marchesa's office on the first floor and that neither she nor her workers were ever there at night. This man, I understood in a flash, was going to enter the building as we did and trap us between the locked front door and the locked iron gate beyond it. Either that, or he would follow us into the elevator and rob us upstairs—or worse. I knew my husband had no inkling of this. He was born without a sense of danger, his mind did not contain the normal cautionary apparatus. I astonished him by pulling my key out of the lock, grabbing his arm, and saying loudly, "Let's go and buy a *gelato*." I dragged him along the street in the direction of the Accademia, beyond which was a popular *gelateria*.

"What?" he said. "Now? So late?" But I was glancing over my shoulder, watching the man rush away from our door in the other direction. We had narrowly missed having something terrible happen to us, and I was shaking at the thought of our hair-thin escape. I didn't want to eat ice cream, but I insisted we each buy a *gelato*. I wanted time to be sure the man was gone, time to gather my senses in the brightly lit shop that always had people in it. *Nocciola*—hazelnut—was the flavor I preferred, but I couldn't even taste it. I was already shivering, and the *gelato* made me colder. When I told my husband what I had thought was going to happen, and how we probably had barely escaped being mugged or killed, he was doubtful. I explained why I had to be right about this: the late night, the fact that we were obviously tourists, what I'd heard about drug users and their need for money, how the man couldn't have been visiting anyone in the building at that hour, that the buzzer he rang did not belong to one of the rented apartments, how he had run away when we hadn't entered the building. My husband didn't contradict me, but I knew he didn't believe that our lives had been in danger. His skepticism and stubborn lack of fear made him seem dense. The thought that I had married a dense human being frightened me.

In the Milan train station we'd nearly been killed because he refused to hail a cab when I asked him to. En route to Florence, we'd flown from Los Angeles to Malpensa Airport and had stayed the night in a Milan hotel that advertised its location as "right across the street from the station." Our plan was to take the train to Florence in the morning.

However, we had four suitcases between us, and the "street" was enormous, with many roadways converging from many angles upon the train station. I argued that we should call a cab. My husband felt we could easily pull our suitcases on wheels, one in each hand, across the many intersections. He didn't like to call cabs if he could walk or take a bus. I knew he felt helpless in a cab, at the mercy of the driver who, in some way, had us in his power.

Years before, also in Milan, we had mistakenly parked our rented car in a tow-away zone near a museum. When we came out, our car, with all our

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luggage (and traveler's checks) was gone. A cabdriver in a café had overheard us calling the police and had offered to drive us to the arena where cars were towed and held until a fine had been paid. When we got there, we saw hundreds of cars in rows waiting to be claimed. The cabdriver proposed to take care of paying the fine, to spare us the complications and paperwork. He said the fine would be $150. My husband hesitated. "Let him do it," I whispered. "Give him the money, he understands the system here." But my husband ignored me and told the man he would pay the fine himself. The driver promptly jumped in his cab and sped away without collecting his fare. It took two hours to find our car, but the fine turned out to be $15.

When I asked our Milan hotel clerk if a cab could get us close to the trains, he said, yes, a cab would take us around the back of the station and to the level of the tracks. My husband still wanted to cross the street by foot. We staggered like drunken sailors toward the station, each of us jerking and hauling our heavy suitcases up and down curbs, pulling, pushing, or pulling and pushing simultaneously, threatened by speeding cars, our arm sockets nearly torn out by the time we gained the safety of the sidewalk. What presented itself to us then was a new obstacle: a long flight of steps ascending to the entrance to the station. The words sat on my tongue like a frog: *If we'd taken a cab* . . . But I didn't say them, since I had the sense to remember where this kind of conversation would lead. We both needed our strength.

My husband told me to stay below and took one suitcase at a time to the top of the staircase, until three were lined up at the top. For a moment I felt he was chivalrous, and my heart softened. He looked quite handsome in his raincoat and turtleneck shirt, his hair blowing wildly in the chilly air. Then he took the fourth suitcase in one hand and my hand in his other, and helped me up the stairs. In the lobby of the station we saw that there was yet another level to reach—this time by escalator. Others already on the escalator were transporting their luggage upward in wire carts on wheels. My husband spotted the source of these carts and, leaving me guarding the suitcases, was away for so long that I feared we would miss our train. By the time he came back pushing two carts, I was cursing my luggage, all the shoes and sweaters and dresses so carefully chosen with an image of myself in Italy "appropriately dressed for all occasions." I realized it didn't matter what either of us wore; we weren't being judged for our good fashion sense, and the stuff was killing us. I could hardly breathe from pushing my tons of junk around.

We somehow got two suitcases balanced on each wire cart. I tried to push mine forward, but it stopped short and the handle crashed into my breasts. My husband showed me that in order for the cart to move, a wire bar under the handle had to be pressed upward. We soon understood the reason. Once a cart was pushed onto the escalator, with two wheels on one step and

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two on a lower step, the wheels locked for safety until the bar was pressed to move the cart forward.

We were moving upward when I looked up to see where the ride would end. The level on which we would board our train was a vast distance above us. We had a long moment to rest before gaining the top.

I was looking down at the station floor below when suddenly something happened. The woman ahead of my husband reached the top of the escalator and couldn't move her wagon off the moving staircase. The stairs disappeared from under her and threw her back against my husband's wagon. He couldn't move forward, and fell back against my wagon, pushing me back against the person behind me. I screamed and felt myself falling down the escalator. I heard the astonished cries and curses of others, who also began tumbling downward. I had a sense we were all falling into hell from a height as great as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

I never knew if the woman at the top found the way to release the brake from her wagon and push it forward or if someone pulled her forcibly off the escalator—but the jam was somehow relieved and my husband was able to get his wagon onto solid land. Whoever pushed me upward to a standing position also shoved me and my wagon off the escalator. I was faintly aware of the desperate rush of bodies to escape the folding steps. They all seemed to be running to save their lives and to catch their trains.

The train to Florence stalled on the track for two hours somewhere en route. We sat facing an older couple who ate salami slices and talked incessantly. I tried to position my feet between theirs under the narrow table between us. Next to my husband was a girl with a cell phone. She chattered away throughout the trip, laughing even while the train was stalled and while we all sweated in the stifling air. A woman in an official uniform distributed two dry biscuits wrapped in plastic to each person, and at some point the conductor passed out certificates entitling us to a partial refund of our fare, to be claimed at the Florence station.

Toward the end of our stay in Italy, I said to my husband, "Call the harpsichord man. We don't have many days left here. Don't miss this opportunity." I urged him each day, and then one afternoon I saw him at the little desk where the phone and my computer sat. "Yes," I heard him say, "I'm a harpsichord player, just an amateur, but a player. Yes, my wife and I would very much like to do that. Yes. Do you know what bus would take us to Porta Romana? We live near the center. I see. Yes, a cab. But what about a bus? The number 12? Yes, I see. Thank you. We'll be there between 7:30 and 8:00 tonight then. Very good."

I decided to wear my Gucci blouse and my dolphin necklace.

The harpsichordist had told my husband we could either take a cab from the Duomo, for about 20,000 lire, or take the bus at San Marco to Porta Romana. "Let's take the cab," I said.

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"Let's take the bus. Then we can look around the neighborhood. And after we see him, we can have dinner in the piazza near Porta Romana. The bus is better."

The piazza of the Porta Romana had, in its center, an enormous statue of a woman carrying what resembled a marble beam—also in the shape of a woman—on her head. The beam-like woman extended far beyond the head of the woman under her, unbalancing the sculpture and giving me a sense of pain, as if I wanted to unburden her and let her rest. The whole image was distressing to look at.

"We have to find a street off to the right," my husband said, consulting his map, "and then we have to find *numero novantanove.*"

"*Novantanove?*"

"Ninety-nine."

The road began to climb directly from the piazza, a steep road going straight up. We passed *numero 1,* and then walked upward for a good distance and passed *numero 3.* I was already out of breath. Ten minutes later we passed *numero 4.*

I said to my husband, "We want *numero ninety-nine?*"

"It can't be too far," he replied.

I climbed, conserving breath. Darkness was falling fast. We walked another full block to *numero 6.* At this rate, I realized, we'd have to reach the very top of the mountain to find the harpsichordist's house. Then it struck me that of course he would live on a mountaintop. He was famous. He was living in Italy. He would not have his home in the crowded apartments near the busy and noisy piazza.

The street had narrowed and on both sides were tall stone walls. The houses hidden behind them were very far apart and marked only by solid wooden gates. Night was upon us and cars were speeding past us up the mountain with their headlights on.

"Stand back," I yelled to my husband. "They don't expect anyone to be walking here. They probably can't even see us!"

It was not possible to walk pressed against the wall, since a culvert or ditch ran along the side of the road. We could no longer walk side by side, so my husband stepped ahead of me and took my hand to pull me along. My heart was pounding. My knees were aching with each step along the increasingly steep upward slant of the road. *This is a terrible mistake,* I wanted to say. *We should turn around and go back to the Porta Romana and get a cab.*

We were now only at number 18; then, ten minutes later, number 20. We should have been at our appointment a half hour before. It would take us (I guessed) an hour to walk back to the piazza to find a cab. By then the famous man would have assumed we weren't coming. Or by then we'd be lying dead in the road, run over like two stray dogs. My hip was beginning to pain me and, even though I was wearing a jacket, I was beginning to shiver.

"Watch out!" I screamed as a car passed by me so closely that its side

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mirror grazed my body. "My God! We're going to be killed! No one expects people to be on this road. I'm sure *no one ever walks here.*"

"People walk here all the time," my husband said, though there was no one here, no one but us. I thought about this strange man I was with, about my pledge to cherish and honor him, and about the mystery of marriage.

"We're not even a third of the way there!"

"Look up ahead, I think it flattens out," he called back. "I think I see a square up there. Then many numbers will be all there in a cluster."

And the road did flatten out. I saw a little red mailbox. I imagined there would be a public phone from which we'd call a cab, maybe a café where we could rest, warm up, drink some coffee. The numbers would, like a prayer answered, leap from 22 to 99, and we would be there at the harpsichord on the mountain. All would end well.

But there was no square there, no cluster of homes, no phone. Just a mailbox at a curve in the road, and we were back climbing endlessly upward.

"Probably it's just a little farther," my husband said. I hated the way his legs moved forward, toward those harpsichords he wanted so much to see, on this errand that drove everything else from his mind.

"I want to go down the mountain now," I told him. "We're nowhere near his house. We'll never find it. We're *nowhere* near it. *Do you understand that?* He won't be there even if we ever get there." I could see a few distant lights dotting their way up the mountain. No clusters, no inviting places for human beings. "If you don't turn around and come with me, I'll go down myself, without you!" I threatened. But when I thought of going down that steep hill in the dark, alone, past the whizzing cars, I wanted to cry.

"It can't be far," my husband said. I stopped and tugged on his hand to make him face me. "Listen! That man is crazy!" I screamed. "He was crazy not to tell you the bus doesn't go to number ninety-nine! He should have said a cab is the only way to get there!" Hysteria had taken over, and some kind of witch was working my lips. "You were too cheap to take a cab and look where you've got us! We're going to die here! Be killed! Or freeze to death! You want me to die just so you can see those fucking harpsichords!"

My husband stopped short and faced me. I could see his expression in the glow of approaching headlights. His fists were clenched and he was baring his teeth at me. He looked insane. Suddenly he stamped his feet.

"Just come on," he said. "Just keep going. It's the only thing to do."

He took my hand tightly and pulled me forward. I looked longingly at the stone walls, imagining that at the next gate, number 30 or 40 or 50, I would bang on the knocker till someone let me inside, let me sit down and rest, let me get warm. I stepped into the culvert and walked close to the wall. I heard dogs howling. My husband's mother was right when she'd told him thirty-odd years ago that I wasn't the right girl for him. I wished he had listened. I tripped on something and went down on my knees.

"Give it up!" I shouted at my husband. "Just give it up!" But this time he

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wouldn't argue. He just tugged me to my feet and dragged me along, like baggage, like those suitcases he had jerked over the road and up the escalator at the Milan train station.

Suddenly there was no wall at the side of the road, no dogs barking, no culvert, and no cars, nothing but a cessation of signs of life. Ahead lay nothing but open field, huge, blank, empty countryside and forest beyond.

"That's it," I said. "We're at the end of the world. There are no more houses." A cold wind blew from the woods, hitting our faces. My husband finally seemed baffled. "We'll die here," I told him.

We could both see that if we forged ahead we'd move into total blackness, into wilderness. There were no more cars. It was quiet, but for the wind.

"If another car passes," I said, "I'm going to stop it."

"Don't do that," my husband said. But I saw headlights coming up the hill, and I was already doing it. I stepped into the center of the road and waved my arms like a maniac. I saw myself in the headlights, a crazy woman in a Gucci blouse dancing on the road. An old red truck swerved to pass me, then slowed. I ran toward it. "I'm going with him," I screamed over my shoulder to my husband, "no matter where he's going."

My husband ran after me. A young man got out of the truck. I began to babble, "We are lost, we are lost!" but the man, who looked sympathetic, didn't understand me. "*Novantanove,*" I cried. "There is no such number, but *mio marito*"—(now I found words)—"mio marito é non logico!" I grabbed my husband's arm: "Tell him in Italian! Tell him we're lost and need help."

While the men spoke in Italian, I opened the door and got into the truck. I wanted to live the rest of my life there. Sitting on those lumpy springs was like experiencing a miracle. I wanted to marry the young Italian who owned the tinny truck, and ride with him over the crest of the mountain and live with him in a farmhouse and never go back to the Palazzo Pucci with the insane stranger, my husband, who had snarled at me when I was exhausted and afraid. I didn't want to be alone with him in that freezing tomb, under the vicious, aristocratic faces of Pucci ancestors.

The truck driver got back in beside me, and my husband squeezed in from the passenger side. "He doesn't think there are any more houses ahead, but I told him we're only at 23 and we need number 99. He said to get in and we'd see what's up ahead." The truck started up and we drove forward into the black forest. Nothing lit the road but the headlights. The truck smelled of grease and the young man's body. "*Grazie, grazie,*" I said to him over and over. I could feel his hip against mine. My husband tried to take my hand, but I pulled away. We drove on, farther and farther from the Porta Romana, where that enormous woman stood in the middle of traffic wearing another huge woman on her head.

"*Ecco,*" said the driver. We saw some lights, and then a wall, and then a door. The truck slowed and edged toward the wall. "*Novantanove!*" my

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husband cried jubilantly. "This is it!" He got out, pulling me after him. I wanted to give the young driver all our money, the pearly dolphin around my neck, the Gucci blouse off my back. My husband reached for his wallet. But the man smiled and dipped his head at me. "Signora," he said, "grazie, no." He shook my husband's hand warmly and drove off.

The famous harpsichordist answered the bell, this lunatic person who had not warned my husband that no one should ever try to take a bus to this place. The man was tall, stately, dignified, handsome. Fame and money had got him a home on a mountaintop. My husband was not famous or rich, and we lived in a plain house on a flat street. Luck, I felt, was unevenly distributed among human beings.

"We *walked* here from the Porta Romana," I said. "You didn't tell my husband we'd have to walk up a mountain."

"I did mention to him that it was best to take a cab."

"Well," I said. "He thought it best not to."

"Why don't you both come in?" he said, leading us through an open courtyard and into his villa, up a narrow staircase into a room with a high domed ceiling, tile floors, and a harpsichord on each wall. I found a small bench and sat down at once. The famous man was telling my husband that the villa was built in the Quattrocentro and that he had had many difficulties in remodeling it. He mentioned grown children in the United States, and I wondered who lived here with him now, if anyone.

"Go ahead," he told my husband. "Try any of these instruments you like. This one is a Dowd, this square one is a Dutch-style virginal, a Skovroneck, and this is a genuine Stein fortepiano like the kind Mozart used, from about 1796." I didn't bother to look—I had seen enough harpsichords to last me all my life—but said to him, "Aren't you going to play them a little for us?" The man needed to understand the sacrifices we had made, the distance we had come, the dangers we had faced. In spite of my problems with my husband, I felt he should get what he had hoped for.

The harpsichordist shrugged, smiled condescendingly, turned his back and disappeared down the stairs. His message seemed clear: *If you want to hear me perform, buy a ticket.*

My husband wandered around the room, sitting down to play some chords here and there, a few bars of the Bach English Suite he'd been practicing at home, a bit of Scarlatti. He seemed transfixed by each instrument, his ears cocked to their tones, his fingers stroking their ebony keys. He bent to examine their painted lids, their elaborate rose holes. He had forgotten I was in the room, forgotten how he had tortured me to get here and how I had almost died. I was expendable. He played the various instruments for about twenty minutes.

Unable to wait any longer, I went downstairs in search of a bathroom and met the famous man coming back up. He was carrying a small tray with food

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and wineglasses on it. "The bathroom?" I asked. He pointed downward and to the right. I found a tiny room with an ancient toilet, not clean, the seat up. He lived here alone.

The man served us squares of focaccia with green olives buried in the salty bread, along with some local red wine. He spoke briefly about his concert schedule, here and in the States. Then he stood up. Clearly, our visit was over; he had someplace to go. "It was nice to meet you—glad you could stop by." He gestured toward the door.

"I am not walking down that mountain," I announced.

The great man stopped, puzzled. He thought for a moment. "Well, then, perhaps you should call a cab." He waited to see which of us would pull out a cell phone. Then he said, "I guess I'll have to call one for you."

He left the room and didn't return for ten minutes. When he did, he said with irritation, "There's no cab to be had at this hour. They don't want to drive up here when they have all the fares they need in the center."

"That's too bad," I said, staying seated.

"I'm sorry," my husband said, "to be so much trouble."

The man looked as if he agreed we'd been far too much trouble. "I suppose I'll have to take you down the mountain, then."

We followed him outside to his two-seater sports car. He pointed to another mountain across a valley. "The pianist Andres Schiff lives over there," he said.

"We don't plan to visit him," I said, for my husband's benefit.

The harpsichordist indicated that I would have to sit on my husband's lap for the trip down the mountain. He roared onto the road at an extremely high speed, taking hairpin turns like a racing-car driver. Curve after curve, I braced myself, falling to one side, then another. Was it possible we had walked up the mountain *this* far?

When we got to the bottom, to Porta Romana, he let us off. I felt he should have taken us ten minutes further to San Marco, or even to our doorway on Via Ricasoli. Since we'd had no dinner, he could have been decent and bought us ice cream at the *gelateria,* the place where we had hid for safety the last time we had almost lost our lives. But the great man dropped us off at the bus stop, in view of the woman carrying her eternal burden, and sped away without so much as a wave.

We waited for the bus for a long, long time. The wind was very cold. My husband slumped against the wall and hung his head. He looked old and melancholy. After a while I leaned backward against his body. I felt as if I might faint. He turned me around and held my face in his hands. I let my body fall against his, my head on his shoulder. He promised that he would hail the first cab he saw.

We waited and waited, but none passed by. Then we saw the lights of the bus, and he stepped forward and held up his hand.

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Blacklisted Titles

KATIA KAPOVICH

The USSR Academy of Science, local branch,
looking like a chocolate cake from afar
with its neoclassical stucco
moulding on the cornices, stood
in scaffolding before the holidays.
Women in the windows,
armed with buckets and sponges,
waved at each other through reflections
of the November sky. The last day of work
before Revolution Day
was coming to an end. An older friend,
a recent university dropout
who now served in this castle as a librarian,
had called me at noon and whispered: Come,
the room will be open for two hours,
and you'll be there all alone . . . But hurry
and don't forget to bring your watch!
I put on my gray sweater to become invisible
and took the #10 trolleybus and then #4.
She waited for me in the empty parking lot,
and when I patted her on the shoulder she cursed,
then recognized me, smiled and sleepily
confessed that she was "dying for a smoke."
We smoked on a bench
my strong cigarettes sans filters.
Her name was Rita, she was nervous and talked a lot.
When Rita talked,
she dropped cigarette ashes around,
peppering the air. At last we went upstairs.
I sneaked into the library right under the nose
of the old monster of a guard, pretending

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that I was headed for room 00,
found door number 03, the Restricted Section,
and turned the knob.
In the dim greenish light I saw
stacks of steel laden with famous books
whose authors had fallen into disgrace.
One had fled abroad, another
had written an angry letter to the authorities,
a third had simply gone out of his mind,
and so on and so forth.
All those books,
taken out of circulation, now marched in files,
stripped of their call numbers, like prisoners of war.
What kind of war was it? Between whom and whom?
Between those who wrote
in the first person plural and those who preferred
the first person singular,
the war of noun cases, of verb tenses,
the cold war of zeroes against natural numbers.
Those were the days when *Lolita,*
Mandelshtam's *Voronezh Notebooks,*
let alone a Solzhenitsyn, could earn you
a couple of years in jail. Those were books
I had dreamed of all my life,
and when I touched them tenderly I touched
the noble velvet of dust on the jackets.
I would read two lines from a volume
and return it to its place, then
pick another and put it back again.
It was too much, too powerful, too enlightening,
"too many notes," too many tunes at once.

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Time gone astray, the early evening
glued the hands of my watch
to the white ice of its dial. The old Cyclops
guarding the entrance/exit had fallen asleep.
I left unseen, intact, blended
into the crowds of people going home,
waiting for buses, loudly talking
about tomorrow's parade.
It was still pretty light in the city,
but all the streetlights were on,
and red November leaves
flew in the air past neon-flooded windows,
past all the taxis lined up along the curbs,
past the open doors of hotels and stores,
past the Monument to the Unknown Soldier,
past all streetlamps, going south with the birds.
I was happy because I was sixteen and overwhelmed
with life, with solitude, with the pride of secret
knowledge. I have understood freedom since
as the expanding universe of that room.
As Maxim Gorky used to say, it's no sin to steal a book,
and I would have, if only I'd been able
to limit my choice to one title.

Katia Kapovich is the co-editor of *Fulcrum*, an annual of poetry and aesthetics. Her work has appeared recently in *The London Review of Books, The Antioch Review, Ploughshares*, and *Harvard Review*.

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Marooned

The Metamorphosis of Alexander Selkirk

TIM SEVERIN

He stands alone on the shoreline. He is such a savage sight that the six oarsmen in the approaching ship's boat take quick glances over their shoulders as they row closer. His legs and callused feet are bare, and the hairy pelts of animals cover his upper thighs and body. He has stitched the skins together into an uncouth jacket, using rawhide thongs. A clumsy, rough cap of the same material protects his head. The coarse animal hair on the pelts merges with the overflow of his long beard and his wild mat of hair so that he resembles a shaggy animal, excited and reared up on two legs.

The two officers in the boat, Captain Thomas Dover and Second Mate Robert Frye, scan the stony beach, trying to judge the best place to land, and the hairy creature waves to them urgently, pointing to a suitable spot. He then rushes forward to greet them as they splash ashore. The visitors are too astonished to speak as the apparition, choking with emotion, throws his arms around the new arrivals and hugs them. The hirsute man has not been able to tan the reeking goatskins he wears. He stinks.

The *Duke*'s yawl finds him. Three weeks earlier, Captain Woodes Rogers had steered his thirty-gun "private ship of war" around Cape Horn, after a difficult four-month passage from Cork in Ireland, and slipped furtively into the Pacific. He and Captain Stephen Courtney of the accompanying twenty-six-gun *Duchess* then lay course for an uninhabited island nearly four hundred miles off the coast of Chile. This is poachers' thinking. The remote

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Tim Severin's books include *The Brendan Voyage, In Search of Genghis Khan,* and *In Search of Moby Dick. In Search of Robinson Crusoe* (forthcoming from Basic Books), from which this essay is adapted, suggests that although the mariner Alexander Selkirk may have been the prototype for Daniel Defoe's castaway, the details of Defoe's story were drawn from the stranding of Henry Pitman, an English surgeon, on the Caribbean desert island of Salt Tortuga.

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island is well away from shipping lanes and will be a temporary base where the crews—more than three hundred men packed in the two cramped, damp ships—can go ashore to stretch their legs and recuperate from their grueling voyage. Then they will launch a surprise attack on the coast of Chile.

The two captains carry licenses to justify this predatory behavior. Their "letters of marque and reprisal," written in florid legal language by government clerks in London, give them leave to harry the enemies of the king of Great Britain. In the year 1709 the king's enemies include all subjects and allies of the Spanish crown. In return, the Spanish regard such raiders as pirates. They also suspect, rightly, that some of the sailors aboard these vessels are ex-buccaneers who have conducted previous hit-and-run raids along the coast of what is modern-day Chile and Peru. If the Spanish authorities can catch them, the luckier ones may be exchanged for ransom, but most will spend the rest of their lives in prison or as slave labor. A few, positively identified for their crimes, will face execution.

So it is a shock when the ships' lookouts spot a light burning on the heights of the island. The two vessels first glimpse the distant outline of land at seven o'clock on the morning of January 31. The island lies to the west of their track, and they immediately turn toward it. But the new course is upwind, and neither vessel is a swift sailer. They make such slow progress that by noon the following day they are wallowing through the swell and are still some four leagues from their landfall. Aboard the *Duke*, Dr. Thomas Dover impetuously asks for the pinnace to be lowered and manned so that he can be rowed ashore. His wish is granted, because he is one of the English shareholders who invested the substantial sum of fourteen thousand pounds to arm and victual the two ships, and he holds the rank of "second captain." Later he will become famous for creating a patent medicine based on opium resin; Dover's Powder will be a stock item of ships' medicine chests for the next two hundred years, prescribed for colds, coughs, insomnia, rheumatism, and dysentery. But its headstrong inventor is no mariner. The distance to the island is too far to row. When darkness falls, the doctor's boat still has some way to go, and the watchers aboard the ships become alarmed. It is obvious that the pinnace will have to turn back and in the darkness may miss the ships altogether. The *Duke* and *Duchess* sling lanterns in the rigging to guide home the strays, and fire off muskets and a gun on the quarterdeck to help them get their bearings. The lookouts peer into the darkness for signs of the returning boat. This is when they distinctly see a point of light. They think at first that it is a lantern aboard the pinnace, but soon realize that the flare must come from a bonfire on land.

This is very ominous. No one had been presumed to live on the island. A bonfire means human presence. Dr. Dover could not have lit the fire, because the pinnace reappears out of the darkness at midnight, and her crew report that they failed to set foot ashore. The obvious explanation for the light is that the Spaniards have garrisoned the island. If so, the privateers

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risk a fiasco. The garrison could already have sent word to the mainland, warning about the arrival of foreign vessels, and the raiders would have lost the all-important element of surprise. But Spain is not the first foe that springs to mind: England is at war with France, and Woodes Rogers and his officers fear that a hostile French squadron has entered the Pacific ahead of them and taken possession of the strategic island.

But the *Duke* and the *Duchess* have "a great many Men down with the Cold, and some with Scurvy." As overall commander of the privateering enterprise, Rogers knows that some invalids will die if they are not taken ashore for treatment. So he has little choice but to proceed with the original plan of landing on Juan Fernàndez. He orders the two ships to prepare to fight any enemy and keeps his course, timing his approach so as to arrive in full daylight. As the sun rises on the morning of February 2, the lookouts grow more puzzled by the hour. There is no sign of human activity on shore. The steep green hills of the island seem utterly deserted.

The *Duke* edges round the island, cautiously leading the way. Her pilot, William Dampier, is an ex-buccaneer who was here four years earlier on a similar raid. He is aware that the best place to moor the vessels is in a shallow bay on the northeast shore. When the anchorage comes into view, there is nothing to be seen. Not a ship in the bay, no boat drawn up on the beach, not even a hut or a wisp of smoke rising from the thick vegetation that clothes the slopes that rise in a steep bowl from the small area of flat ground close to the water's edge. The place looks as though no living soul has set foot there since the beginning of time. The ships are tacking slowly into the anchorage, making sluggish headway against the fluky and unpredictable wind that blows in sudden gusts from the high ground, when the impatient second captain, Dr. Dover, again decides to lead a reconnaissance. He takes the *Duke*'s yawl, six oarsmen, and the second mate, and heads off for the beach even before the ships have dropped anchor.

The man in goatskins had sighted them the previous evening. Months earlier he had cut a supply of firewood and stacked it ready for use. Last night he stayed up tending the blaze so that it would serve as a beacon, unaware that the bright point of light risked scaring away his rescuers. He has also cooked some goat's meat, knowing the sea-weary crews would relish it. Now he offers to show his visitors the secret hut where he lives. It is scarcely a mile away, but the undergrowth is so thick, and the path so difficult, that only Robert Frye, the second mate, accompanies the hairy islander as he pushes his way through the brushwood, protected by his goatskin jacket. Frye arrives at a modest shelter made of branches and thatched with local grass. The interior has been lined with more goatskins. The only furnishings are a sea chest, a cooking pot, and some worn bedding, together with a musket that lacks gunpowder and a makeshift knife fashioned by rubbing down an iron hoop into a blade. Significantly, there

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are also a few navigation instruments and a basic library comprising several books of navigational tables, as well as some devotional texts and a Bible. Nearby is a second, smaller hut, which the man uses as his kitchen. He says he has been living there for four years and four months, on his own.

Aboard the *Duke,* Captain Rogers is becoming anxious to know what is keeping the yawl. He sends the pinnace to investigate, and the boat returns almost immediately, carrying the wild-looking stranger and a scrabbling, clattering cargo of large, bright pink crayfish, which the men in the yawl have found crawling in great numbers in the shallows. Rogers hospitably offers the newcomer a drink, but he declines. He has not touched a drop of alcohol since he has been on the island, he says, and he no longer has the habit. It is difficult to understand what he is saying. He speaks slowly, dragging out his words and dividing them into halves as though he has partially lost the power of speech during his long period of isolation.

The newcomer identifies himself. He is Alexander Selkirk, born in Scotland and a mariner by profession. He is thirty-three years old and last saw a friendly face when he was twenty-nine. He has kept track of time by carving marks into a tree to record months and days. During his four years of solitary existence, he has seen ships pass by. But they were always Spanish vessels, and he was too frightened to attract their attention for fear of what might happen to him. Usually the ships maintained their course and steered past the island, but on one occasion two ships came into the bay, dropped anchor, and put men ashore. They caught a glimpse of Selkirk, fired shots, and gave chase. Dodging into the bushes, he ran off and scrambled up a tree. His hunters paused underneath him while one urinated against the tree trunk, but they failed to notice him. The Spaniards shot several goats for their larder, then abandoned their human chase and sailed away, confident that they were leaving the fugitive to harmless solitude.

The Scotsman also volunteers the surprising information that he is not a castaway, but had chosen to be on the island by himself, at least at the beginning. He had come ashore from the privateer galley *Cinque Ports,* where he was sailing master, after quarreling with her captain, Thomas Stradling. Having made a series of mismanaged raids on the mainland, Stradling had brought his leaky vessel to the island for repairs. Selkirk believed the *Cinque Ports* was still so unseaworthy, and he detested his captain so heartily, that when Stradling was ready to leave he refused to sail with him. Sick of his cantankerous crewman, Stradling set Selkirk ashore with his personal baggage, a pound of gunpowder and some shot for his musket, a small quantity of tobacco, and a little food. It will later be claimed that Selkirk suffered a change of heart at the last minute; that as the ship's boat pulled away, he ran down into the water and begged to be taken aboard. Stradling is alleged to have called back mockingly that he was glad to be rid of him. Technically, then, Selkirk is a maroon, purposely left ashore on a deserted island or coast to fend for himself.

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Unexpectedly, the *Duke*'s pilot vouches for Selkirk. He recognizes the Scotsman as a former shipmate and says that he was the best man aboard the *Cinque Ports*. Woodes Rogers realizes that finding Selkirk is a stroke of good fortune. The navigation instruments kept in the Scotsman's hut indicate that he knows how to find his way at sea, and clearly he has first-hand knowledge of the poorly charted South American coast. Rogers offers Selkirk a post as mate aboard the *Duke*, and when the Scotsman accepts, he dispatches him back to the beach to assist the shore parties.

Selkirk guides Dr. Dover and his assistants to places where they can gather wild turnips, watercress, and native greenstuffs. These will help to cure the ships' scurvy-stricken invalids, who are brought ashore and housed in tents made of sails stretched between the trees. Selkirk also leads shore parties on goat-hunting expeditions, and astonishes them with his technique. After years of living on the mountainous island, he is so fit and agile that he does not shoot the goats. He runs after them until he overtakes them, then grabs one. When the hunters bring a dog ashore to help them, Selkirk outruns that animal too. He explains that he learned to catch goats by hand after using up his pound of gunpowder. In the end he became so deft that he had turned the chase into a sport. Catching a goat, he would mark the animal by slitting its ears, and let it go. He calculates that his total catch over the years is four hundred animals. In deference to Selkirk's mastery of his little island kingdom, the sailors soon take to calling him the Governor.

Only two scurvy victims die—a very light toll, in the opinion of Woodes Rogers—and within ten days the other convalescents have recovered enough for the privateers to make ready to leave the island. As the two ships sail for their surprise attack on the mainland, Woodes Rogers observes in his journal that Selkirk needs time to adapt to shipboard life. His feet swell up and hurt when he tries to wear shoes, and he has difficulty eating the ship's food. There was no salt on Selkirk's island—a reason why he could not cure his goatskins properly—and he finds it hard to digest the ship's rations, which are heavily salted for preservation. His diet for four years has been based on fresh goat meat, fresh vegetables, and wild plants. In the beginning he also ate many crayfish "as big as lobsters" because they were so easy to catch in the shallows. But eventually he got so tired of the taste of crayfish, whether boiled or roasted, that he could eat them only "as jellies," a seafarer's term for shipboard food that was neither solid nor salted. Fishing was also easy, but the fish he ate gave him diarrhea, so he stopped catching them. Rogers notes also that Selkirk remains taciturn and withdrawn. But this may be the Scotsman's natural character; his restrained manner does not detract from the performance of his duties. Selkirk has now joined a far more successful enterprise than his venture with the odious Captain Stradling. He will learn, probably with grim satisfaction, that his former commander met his just deserts after the marooning. His

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patched-up ship foundered on the mainland coast, and several of the crew drowned. The rest, including Stradling, got away from the wreck on rafts. The Spaniards captured them and threw them into prison.

Woodes Rogers, by contrast, now has a run of luck. His force intercepts one small ship after another and robs their passengers at sword point. The marauders hold to ransom several coastal towns, and steadily amass a treasure in pieces of eight, gold necklaces and chains, and silver sword handles and plate. The only real disappointment is their failure to capture the larger of the two Manila Galleons bringing this year's shipment of treasure from the Philippines to Acapulco. The smaller galleon strikes her flag after a stiff sea fight, during which a bullet hits Woodes Rogers in the upper left cheek and carries away part of the jaw, so that some of his teeth drop out on deck. With one treasure ship taken, Rogers doggedly sets off to intercept the larger, richer galleon, but she proves too powerful, though Rogers presses home the attack with his usual determination, lying on the deck in a pool of blood after a flying splinter strikes his heel.

Selkirk behaves admirably throughout the expedition. He leads boat crews on raids along the rivers and is appointed to command one of the prizes. When the *Duke* and *Duchess* drop anchor in London, having sailed round the world to get there, his share of the prize money is calculated to be worth £800. This is a very considerable reward at a time when a shopkeeper might expect to earn £45 a year (though just how much of the £800 Selkirk actually receives is uncertain because the division of the expedition's spoils will be contested through the courts for years to come). Selkirk has now been away for eight years, one month, and three days.

The successful return of the privateers in October 1711 causes a sensation. There are excited reports that the original investors will make more than 500 percent profit. Tavern gossips savor the tales of desperate battles and the whiff of gunpowder. Educated society picks over the descriptions of strange lands, their plants and animals, and the hitherto unknown customs of their natives. Edward Cooke, second captain of the *Duchess,* quickly publishes a book about his experiences on the expedition, and soon afterward Woodes Rogers does the same. Both describe the bizarre episode of picking up the solitary islander dressed in goatskins, and Selkirk becomes a celebrity. The essayist Richard Steele will claim in an issue of his magazine *The Englishman,* published in December 1713, that he met and interviewed Selkirk, though this may have been a journalistic fabrication. Steele writes that even if he had not known Selkirk's story before he met him, something about the Scotsman's demeanor suggested that the man had been "much separated from Company." There was a "strong but cheerful seriousness in his Look, and a certain disregard for the ordinary things about him as if he had been sunk in thought." Steele also publishes the surprising assertion that Selkirk did not want to be rescued by the *Duke* and *Duchess:* all he wanted was to help

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the sailors with the gift of fresh supplies and to send them on their way. According to Steele, the Scotsman felt he was now worse off than when he was on the island. Steele quotes him as saying, "I am now worth 800 Pounds, but shall never be so happy as when I was not worth a Farthing."

Alexander Selkirk should then have faded into the background. He was, after all, not the only mariner to be rescued from a lonely shore and to tell of his adventures. He went to Scotland to visit his family and stayed for about two years, presumably living off his prize money as it was dribbled out by the shareholder consortium. By March 1717 he had moved to London, where he entered into a "marriage"—whether formal or informal is not clear—with a Scottish girl, Sophia Bruce.

So he was probably in London in 1719, when newspaper advertisements announced the publication of a romantic novel. The picture on the front page of the book bears a conspicuous resemblance to Selkirk himself. The engraving is the book's only illustration and shows a rather melancholy-looking man standing on the shore of an island, gazing inland. He is dressed in a goatskin coat belted at the waist over shaggy breeches; his feet and shins are bare, and he has a heavy beard. On his head is an odd-looking conical hat. The man carries a flintlock musket on each shoulder—one more gun than Selkirk possessed—and the barrel of a pistol can just be seen, tucked into his belt. A bowl-hilted sword hangs behind him, completing his armament. If Selkirk did not see the similarity, others certainly recognized the former sailing master of the *Cinque Ports* as the true-life model for *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe . . . etc etc Written by Himself.*

Daniel Defoe, a secretive man, neither denied nor confirmed that Selkirk was the model for the hero of his book. Apparently written in six months or less, *Robinson Crusoe* was a publishing phenomenon. Readers scrambled to buy it. A second edition appeared within two weeks, and another less than a month later, in two versions from two different printers. By mid-August the authorized publisher had churned out four editions and was farming out the printing to subcontractors in order to harvest maximum sales before imitators began issuing illegal copies. There were at least four bogus versions on the market at year's end, and a popular journal brazenly began serializing the novel in seventy-seven installments without asking the author's permission. Daniel Defoe was soon identified as that author, but he chose not to put his name to the sequel, the *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe,* which he dashed off in less than four months to cash in on his stunning success. Its leading character now has little resemblance to Selkirk. In this volume he pays a short return visit to his island, now a prosperous colony; makes trading trips in the East Indies; and then, an old man, comes home by the overland route through China and Siberia. There was no echo of Selkirk in the third and final volume to appear with Crusoe in its title, as Defoe wrung the last scrap of advantage from his publishing

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triumph. *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was a dull book of moralizing, and it sank without trace.

But *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures* continued to delight readers. They relished the practical details of how Crusoe, the sole survivor of a shipwreck, manages to build a house, grow crops, and live quite comfortably by a mix of inventiveness and hard work. Defoe had a genius for describing his hero's thoughts and worries, and he made Crusoe a plausible figure. Friday appears conveniently on the scene just when the narrative might become tedious, and there follows plenty of action, with battles against cannibals and the arrival of a European ship in the hands of piratical mutineers whom Crusoe outwits, thus managing to escape the island.

The book had gone into its fifth edition when Alexander Selkirk died, at the age of forty-seven, on December 13, 1721. The frontispiece was still the drawing of a man in goatskins, an image that would become iconic. Here is Crusoe with Man Friday beside him on the seashore, muskets on their shoulders, sternly dealing with sailors from a ship anchored in the bay. In the woodlands behind the two men we glimpse a ladder, the entry to the camouflaged stockade that Crusoe laboriously constructs as his refuge. Farther inland is the other stockade, his "country bower," in which reclines his parrot, Poll. A banner issues from its mouth with the immortal (and misspelled) line "Poor Robin Cruso." Dotted around the perimeter of the island, with its pleasant hills and dales, are bands of cannibals engaged in ghoulish activities—disemboweling a captive before eating him, dancing around their cooking fire with human limbs and scraps just behind them, and, in the top right-hand corner, fighting back when Crusoe attacks them.

The topography is a helpful fantasy—a diagram to assist the reader in following Crusoe on his exploratory walks, gun in hand, with a basket of provisions strapped to his back and sheltered by his great umbrella. It is an island terrain of the imagination, yet Defoe was at pains to give the impression that the island really did exist and could be found off the coast of South America, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Caribbean Sea. The title of the first volume of Crusoe's adventures states that it is the memoir of "Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island in the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With an Account of how he was at last strangely delivered by Pyrates." The text puts the island near enough to the mainland for Crusoe to see mountains on the horizon; the gulf that separates him from the continent is narrow enough for cannibals to paddle across in canoes for their human feasts on the strand. The text, in fact, locates the island at 9 degrees 22 minutes north latitude, and states that the island of Trinidad is visible to the west and northwest. The fourth edition of the book even included a world map, on which "R. Crusoe's I[sland]" was placed just off the delta of the Orinoco.

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There is no such island near the mouth of the Orinoco today, nor was there in Defoe's time. There are only low shoals and shifting banks laid down by silt from the river delta, or heaped up by current-driven sand. Robinson Crusoe's Orinoco island is an invention, like the specious claim that the book of his "surprizing adventures" was written "by Himself." Yet the island is not entirely a mirage. Like the Great Roc lifting the castaway Sindbad the Sailor from his shipwreck shore, Defoe plucks Robinson Crusoe from the Pacific island where the *Duke* found Selkirk, carries him through the air at whirlwind speed, and sets him down on an island in another ocean, 2,700 miles distant, on the far side of South America. This was a deliberate landing. Defoe was a good geographer. He was knowledgeable enough to write the preface for a large and authoritative maritime atlas, and he deposits Crusoe in a picturesque region that he knew would fascinate his readers—the Caribbean shore, with its hurricanes and heats, its blue seas and lush jungles. Here flourish exotic plants and animals that Defoe's contemporaries, genuine travelers, were meeting for the first time—manatees they confused with mermaids, palm trees that tasted of cabbages, howler monkeys pelting fruit at passersby, alligators ambushing pedestrians in the forest, bushes with sap so toxic that you broke out in a rash if you walked too close. It was an area that Defoe knew in considerable detail, though he had never been there himself. He had spent years lobbying for the foundation of new English colonies in Central and South America, and gathering information about the best possible sites.

Placing Crusoe on the Spanish Main also allowed Defoe to write about pirates. An avid fan of pirate lore, he read everything he could about their deeds, their customs, their trials and escapades. He wrote books and plays about pirates, both fictional and real. Scholars long believed—though this theory is now largely discarded—that the mysterious "Captain Johnson" who wrote the main source of all pirate stories, *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates,* actually was Defoe.

In the end it is pirates who give Crusoe his chance to escape his island.

When Defoe died, twelve years after writing Robinson Crusoe's story, his private library was sold at public auction. The auctioneer's bill of sale cites volume after volume of travel books. Some could have provided events and details that Defoe included in his novel. One that almost certainly did was the work of the *Duke*'s ex-buccaneer pilot, William Dampier. He too wrote a best-selling book about his adventures, and it was surely one of Defoe's main sources for Caribbean geography. Dampier's book has a sober map of real places in and around the Spanish Main. Here are genuine islands and coastlines, instantly recognizable when checked against a modern atlas, and accurately drawn by a leading London cartographer, Herman Moll. The map in Dampier's book summarizes what was publicly known about Caribbean geography when Defoe was writing *The Strange Surprizing*

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Adventures; it pinpoints the islands whose names figured in the pirate and adventure narratives that Defoe had been reading. Here are the locations for real maroons and castaways, and the rendezvous of buccaneers—Aves, the "island of birds" off Venezuela; Golden Island in the San Blas Archipelago off Panama; the Mosquito Coast of what is now Nicaragua and Honduras; and several islands called Tortuga, because turtles came ashore to lay their eggs on so many Caribbean beaches that island after island was given the Spanish name for turtle. One of these Tortugas lies less than three days' sail from the spot where Defoe had Robinson Crusoe spending his lonely days.

To inhabit his island of magpie geography, Defoe assembled his hero from a jumble of half-remembered tales of adventures, maroonings, and shipwrecks. Crusoe, like his island, is a composite—not a mere clone of Alexander Selkirk. The "surprizing adventures" of the man in goatskin garb quickly diverge from what happened to the cranky Scots sailor. Selkirk left the *Cinque Ports* of his own free will to live on the island, but Robinson Crusoe is a castaway, the sole survivor of a shipwreck. Selkirk had only his meager supplies from Captain Stradling, but Crusoe is able to salvage all manner of useful goods—muskets, kegs of powder, bags of nails and spikes, hatchets, crowbars, even a grindstone—from his shipwreck. Selkirk was never visited by native peoples; Crusoe encounters cannibals and enlists Friday. Selkirk spent fifty-two months on his island; Crusoe is stranded for a nearly impossible twenty-eight years. In the end Crusoe is much more interesting and diverse than Alexander Selkirk, and more complex.

No one has found any hard evidence that Defoe ever met Selkirk. If he had, Defoe would have realized at once that his hardworking, God-fearing Robinson Crusoe was a continent apart in character, as well as location, from the Scots maroon. Trawling court records, Selkirk's biographers have discovered that his true character was appalling. He was a troublemaker, a cheat, and a bully. At home in Scotland he beat up close relatives during family rows, and was embroiled in a brawl with a shipwright in Bristol. A warrant was issued for his arrest on a charge of assault. He treated his "wife," Sophia Bruce, abominably. She came from Scotland to London, presumably to marry him, but he delayed the wedding, then neglected her. Two years later, after joining the navy, he probably committed bigamy by marrying his landlady in Plymouth. After Selkirk's death at sea, two women showed up to claim his back pay and what may have been the remnants of his South Sea booty—four gold rings, a silver tobacco box, "one gold head of a cane," a pair of gold candlesticks, and a silver-hilted sword. Each woman produced a will made out in her favor; Sophia claimed that her husband must have been drunk when he married his landlady. The ex-landlady countered with the claim that Selkirk had "solemnly declared . . . that he was then a Single and unmarried person, and was very importunate" in his courtship. She won her case. Selkirk, evidently, could create his own plausible fiction.

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The Peculiarities of German Travel

MICHAEL GORRA

On a cold March morning, I wait in a long line at Hamburg's Fuhlsbuettel Airport to check my bag for a flight to Milan. It's a Friday and there are, it's true, a few gray suits around me, carrying briefcases and not much else, setting out for a day's work building Europe. I myself will be catching a second flight, moving on to Venice for a conference. But most of the people around me appear to be headed for a pleasure unmitigated by even the illusion of work, and they wear an air of relaxed expectation. It is a line of loose suede jackets and open collars, of sunglasses and fine silk scarves, and nearly everybody in it has already put in a few hours at the tanning salon. Nobody looks worried, fathers seem patient with their teenaged children, and I remember Dr. Johnson's claim that "the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that takes him to England!" So perhaps, I think, the happiest moment in any German's life is that in which the Alitalia ticket counter comes into view. Germans themselves often seem to want a break from Germany, and in most of the country's large cities there seem to be more travel agencies than grocery stores. The Germans go anywhere warm: Majorca, the Canary Islands, Mauritius, Florida. But they have always had a special love for the land where the lemon trees bloom; even the medieval emperors, those Ottos and Heinrichs and Friedrichs, preferred sunning themselves on the Adriatic to shivering on the Rhine.

Goethe himself seems to have a sense of excitement as—traveling alone and under an assumed name—he jumped into the mail coach that would

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take him on the first leg of his own Italian journey in 1786. "I slipped out of Carlsbad at three in the morning," he writes, "otherwise I would not have been allowed to leave"; and if he exaggerates the danger of his friends detaining him, he nevertheless had to ask his duke for a leave of absence. His sense of escape sounds real, and it seems to grow with each mile he moves south. In Munich he eats his first figs and, once over the Brenner Pass, is thrilled by "the first hillside vineyards . . . [and] a woman selling pears and peaches"; later there will be the richly laden olive. "How happy I am," he cries, "that, from now on, a language I have always loved will be the living common speech." Nor was he alone in that exhilaration. Twenty years later a young Frenchman who wasn't yet known as Stendhal would dream of Italy while working as a civil servant in Braunschweig—a lesser position than Goethe's, but in the service of a greater master. And when, after that master's fall, the now-unemployed Henri Beyle decided to write about the leaves of absence he'd spent in the south, he took for his name that of a Saxon town, and depicted himself as a cavalry officer setting out from Berlin: "I open the letter which grants me four months' leave—I am transported with joy, my heart beats faster!"

Yet if their elation at the moment of departure seems similar, Goethe and Stendhal are in almost nothing else alike, and in comparing them it's possible to locate a set of contrasting desires and beliefs that even now determine the range of the traveler's response—and not only about Italy. For Stendhal the peninsula is above all the site for "pure pleasure," where La Scala can put him in such a "feverish daze" of delight that the land becomes "in truth merely an occasion for sensations," above all for the sensation of beauty, or rather that of happiness. For in one of his most famous aphorisms the two seem to merge, making "beauty nothing more than the promise of happiness," and of course the beauty that most attracts him is that of Milan's women: beauty so overwhelming that it "obliges one to turn one's eyes away."

One could hardly imagine a greater contrast to Goethe, whose attitude toward pleasure and indeed toward Italy itself seems considerably more ambivalent, if not necessarily more complex. Stendhal may enjoy "the happiness of . . . wandering almost at random . . . without thinking about [my] duty to see," but Goethe will have none of that, and reminds himself that "I am not here simply to have a good time, but to devote myself to the noble objects about me, to educate myself." Italy isn't a place for pleasure so much as it is for *Bildung*—though that education can itself produce a "joyous composure," and the "presence of such noble objects makes me feel very happy." His visual sense awakens, and he feels "the moral effect of living in a larger world," one that has changed him "to the very marrow of [his] bones." Stendhal travels, as Dennis Porter has written, "to be ravished by the spectacle of beauty"; Goethe travels to locate himself in relation to the past. "My purpose in making this wonderful journey," the latter writes,

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"is not to delude myself but to discover myself in the objects I see." It would be easy to read that sentence uncharitably: the traveler from the north projects himself onto the warm landscape of the south and finds in its exotic beauty some analogue for his inner life. But I don't want to take Goethe's statement as such an act of appropriation, even though he quite consciously presents himself as an awestruck inheritor of Rome's never-vanished glory. He doesn't impose himself on Italy so much as he hopes that Italy will impose itself on him.

"What I want to see," he writes, "is the Everlasting Rome, not the Rome which is replaced by another every decade." That sense of the everlasting does indeed dominate his *Italian Journey*. Goethe may describe the Carnival and offer a memorable account of Neapolitan street life, but his interest is still in monuments, not manners. Stendhal's concerns are exactly the opposite. Most tourists, he argues, content themselves with giving a reliable description of works of art, but he wants instead to capture "the inner, secret life of Italy." Some of those secrets are, of course, political ones. His *Rome, Naples and Florence in 1817* is marked by republican longings in a time of reaction, and because of his own involvement with the Carbonari, Stendhal himself was, accordingly, expelled from Italy in 1821. He doesn't want an everlasting Italy, he wants a new one, and his use of a date in his title suggests the possibility that the country may soon be different. But in the absence of political change, he is content to limn the moment, fascinated by the everyday life that Goethe eschews, noting the details of this year's clothes, this year's music, manners, love affairs.

Nevertheless, these very different writers do have one crucial thing in common: for each, Italy provides the opportunity for both an expansion and a record of their sharply varying sensibilities. And taken together, Goethe and Stendhal seem indeed to provide a menu of travel's possibilities. Pleasure, learning, monuments, mores—it's perhaps a sign of the complex and richly varied role Italy plays in the European imagination that both their approaches should seem equally plausible.

But what about the land from which Goethe in fact and Stendhal in fiction set out? What about Germany? What possibilities does it hold for the traveler—and the travel writer? My wife and I recently spent a sabbatical year in Hamburg, and when I learned that we would be going, I began looking for things to read: some history certainly, a few novels, studies of postwar and post-Wende society. But I also thought I would hunt down some travel books, as I had in preparation for earlier trips to Italy and India. I knew of one already—Patrick Leigh Fermor's *A Time of Gifts*. My local bookstore gave me guides to national character: Gordon Craig's indispensable *The Germans*, John Ardagh's social anatomy, *Germany and the Germans*. I reread my Isherwood—not only *The Berlin Stories* but also the more explicitly autobiographical *Christopher and His Kind*—and I found

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many shrewd books of political reportage, including Mark Fisher's *After the Wall* and Jane Kramer's *Politics of Memory*. Ian Buruma's *Wages of Guilt* compared the way in which Germany and Japan have dealt with the memory of the Second World War, and Tina Rosenberg's *Haunted Land* described eastern Germany's exit from Communism. Yet Leigh Fermor found no companions; my shelves stayed empty when I went looking for some Teutonic equivalent of Mary McCarthy's *Venice Observed* or V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness*. But why?

So I went back to *A Time of Gifts*. I'd read it years before, prepping for a trip to Vienna, but had moved quickly through its chapters on Germany and had little memory of them beyond the pleasure I'd taken in the writer's store of odd knowledge. Now I opened it again—and found it a rich and most peculiar travel narrative indeed. The Anglo-Irish Leigh Fermor spent the Second World War as a partisan leader in Crete; his band's successful kidnapping of a German general provided the basis for the Michael Powell film *Ill Met by Moonlight*, with Dirk Bogarde in the lead as Paddy. *A Time of Gifts* records Leigh Fermor's attempt, when he was eighteen and recently expelled from his public school, to walk across Europe, "from the Hook of Holland" to Constantinople, though this volume, at least, takes him only so far as the Hungarian border. He wanders south along the Rhine, and spends a night in a Düsseldorf doss-house, chopping wood in the morning in exchange for his bed and a breakfast of black bread and coffee. Later he hitches a ride on a barge bound toward Karlsruhe with a load of cement and tries to learn German by reading Shakespeare in translation. His circumstances change from day to day; more than once a phone call leads to a bed in a castle, where he spends the evening drinking coffee under the "snowy convolutions" of an eighteenth-century ceiling. He becomes familiar with the educated German's habit of capping all conversations with a quotation from Goethe, and with every step he recites the historic names for which each place is remembered, spins theories, learns folk songs.

Page by page, it's lovely—but what gives the book its point is its date, or rather the difference between the date of the journey itself and that of its writing. Leigh Fermor set out on his walk in December 1933, yet while he draws upon journals he kept at the time, the book itself wasn't put together until the 1970s; the older man writes it, and in full knowledge of what was to come. But that knowledge is of a special kind. For if he now and then allows himself a retrospective moment, Leigh Fermor does not foreshadow in a way that would destroy his memories of his own naïveté, his own pleasure and excitement in his voyage, his uncomplicated affection for many of the people he meets. On his first day he passes through a town "hung with National Socialist banners" and sees a haberdasher's window full of "armbands [and] brown shirts." Though he quickly realizes that "appalling things had happened since Hitler had come into power," he also notes that many of the people he met were disgusted by it all. If he is never taken in

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by the German state, neither does he lose sight of those "high points of recollection that failed to succumb to the obliterating mood of war," his excited and ever-growing appreciation for medieval architecture, "two marvellous swans" of girls in Stuttgart, the kindness of the Bavarian "farm people and foresters and woodcutters," with whom he spends the evenings on his walk from Munich to the Austrian border.

And as one reads, one fills in the gap of years, juxtaposing the warmth and the generosity that so many people showed him with one's knowledge of what the future would be. The effect is to separate Leigh Fermor's private memory of Germany from his, from our, historical knowledge. He does not treat his experience "as the harbinger of an already determined future," to borrow Michael André Bernstein's language in *Foregone Conclusions,* his study of Holocaust narratology. For "each present, and each separate life, has its own distinct value that later events cannot wholly take away, and we must believe this in order to continue to have any conviction about our own actions and plans." We may read Leigh Fermor's tale ironically. But he could not have given a faithful portrait of the young man he was had he chosen to discount or deny the pleasure of his journey—had he written it as though that self-described "sleep-walking" young man should have known what would happen.

The very terms of Leigh Fermor's achievement do, however, suggest the difficulty of writing a travel book about Germany. In an 1889 memoir, the British publisher John Murray III wrote that he began to develop his eponymous handbooks, those compact little volumes that led generations of Anglo-American tourists across Europe, when "on landing at Hamburg, I found myself destitute" of advice about what to see and where to stay. In consequence he "set to work to collect for myself all the facts which an English tourist would be likely to require." Yet rather than "cram in everything . . . I made it my aim to point out things *peculiar* to the spot, or which might be better seen there than elsewhere." I want to focus on that word *peculiar,* for that is indeed what all travel writing concentrates on, not just guidebooks, but also the seemingly more responsive travel narrative. Flaubert in Egypt, Bruce Chatwin wandering through Patagonia—they need, they stress, the peculiar at least as much as Murray does, with his advice about roads and rates of exchange. For travel is a form of digression, a digression from daily life. We travel for difference, and so we concentrate on those things—the buildings, the food, the people—that distinguish this place from that, on the exceptions to the ordinary run of our lives. And in consequence nearly all travel writing depends upon metonymy. Or perhaps upon cliché. It identifies those aspects of a country or culture that differ from other countries, other cultures, and then identifies those attributes with the whole, a catalogue of the typical that in Germany runs to sausages and lederhosen, Volkswagens and blondes, and a cultural prohibition against jaywalking and

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Sunday shopping alike—all of them serving to define the country much more to foreigners than they do to the inhabitants themselves.

In a German context, however, the word *peculiar* has an unintended but particular referent: the *Sonderweg* that many historians in Germany and abroad have insisted on, a "special path" that kept nineteenth-century German society from the "normal" bourgeois development of France or Britain. For some, of course, that *Sonderweg* was Germany's special glory, constituting, in Thomas Mann's skeptical and yet oddly admiring description, its "depth . . . the musicality of the German soul, that which we call its inwardness." Yet Mann believed that "such musicality of soul is paid for dearly in another sphere," and that the *Sonderweg* had led to the Third Reich. Some writers do, of course, dispute that historiographical model; the British historians David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley have argued in their *Peculiarities of German History*, published in 1984, that there was no special path, not if by that one means an inevitable road to Auschwitz. Nineteenth-century Germany was *not* so different from its European neighbors, and Blackbourn and Eley insist on replacing a teleological reading of German history with an appreciation for the role of contingency in all human affairs. Things might have turned out differently. Might have—but didn't. For whatever Germany may have been in the nineteenth century, it has most surely followed a special path in the century that recently ended. If in traveling we are to follow Murray and concentrate on those "things *peculiar* to the spot," if we think of a country in terms of those things that mark it out from others, then Germany's most easily discernible features assume the shape not of architecture or cuisine or manners, but of history. The metonymy with which it is still most surely identified is that of the Third Reich.

Whether that's fair—after more than fifty years of the Bundesrepublik and NATO and the *Wirtschaftswunder,* after the European Union and the Wall and Willy Brandt and the Greens and the Wende, after we have all acquired German-made countertop coffee machines and coveted German cars—is of course a different question. But it's also one that's moot. I suspect that such a metonymy will hold for as long as any of us has a living memory of those for whom the war was a living memory. It is surely a superficial judgment, and as with Leigh Fermor it may not—I hope it does not—affect our, my, relations with individual men and women. Yet there it is, and that peculiarity presents the traveler with a curious problem. It ought in one sense to be simple to write about Germany. Since that country's young and well educated often today use the adjective *German* pejoratively, it would seem one could have an easy conscience in drawing on national stereotypes, the travel writer's old and now-discredited stock-in-trade. But in another sense it's very hard. Think of the reasons for travel that Stendhal and Goethe suggest. The observation of manners and mores, yes; and monuments and ruins as well; and sometimes even the country's "secret, inner life," which is not at all the same thing as what Mann meant by *Innerlichkeit.*

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There's Goethe's statement that "I am not here simply to have a good time, but . . . to educate myself." To educate myself above all about that which can be better seen here than elsewhere. Learning about such peculiarities, however, does seem as though it ought to undercut one's ability to have "a good time," and where does that leave Stendhal's belief that one should travel for "pure pleasure"?

I find Hamburg as pleasant and easy a city to live in as any I know, and I have been as happy sitting in its cafés and walking along its streets as I have been at any point in my life. But there seems to me something risible, even something scandalous, in that sentence as I write it. For what role should we give to pleasure here? Or to put it another way, can one write about Germany without also writing about, concentrating on, perpetually taking the temperature of The German Problem? In the preface to his *Little Tour in France,* Henry James writes that once a traveler goes beyond "the delight of the eyes," he has no choice but to pursue "the inner springs of the subject—springs and connections social, economic, historic." That's precisely what James himself refuses to do, concentrating instead on the pageant of French history, the intrigues of the sixteenth century as they played themselves out in the châteaux of the Loire, the visual feast of the Romanesque. Yet in Germany—where every casual unpleasantness seems to carry the past as a penumbra, where, for the newcomer, no behavior, however innocent, can be innocently seen—it seems impossible to avoid those "inner springs."

Impossible, that is, to avoid a different kind of rhetoric, one that for me is best defined by Stephen Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions.* Writing of Montaigne's "On the Cannibals," that great and early attempt to comprehend the wonder of the Americas, Greenblatt stresses the importance of the essayist's decision to put the piece in the voice of his servant, "'a simple, crude fellow,'" and therefore "a reliable observer." For clever people, Montaigne suggests, "never show you things as they are, but bend and disguise them according to the way they have seen them." His servant doesn't have the verbal dexterity to lie or exaggerate, and Greenblatt uses that fact to make the servant's "unfigured language of perception" into the very type of the rhetoric of exploration. In contrast to poetry, where style was "frequently understood as an elegant garment," the literature of exploration claimed to offer "a clear view of the naked truth," in which style functioned as a "trustworthy" and unobtrusive servant, "the agent of simple reporting."

Most postwar writing about Germany has tended toward such a rhetorical model, and not toward the impressionistic record of a sensibility on tour that one associates with Stendhal or James. It has allied itself with the literature of exploration, stressing its own reportorial quality, its own reliability; about this country we still want the news. As Montaigne's servant was held to be a "reliable witness," so the writer on postwar Germany has seen him-

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or herself as bearing witness to—well, to the kind of large questions we don't usually ask about other countries. Part of taking The German Problem's temperature is the desire to be up to date, to provide the latest bulletin; a desire that rests upon the paradoxical belief that the country is in a state of perpetual crisis, at once constantly changing and yet somehow also unaltered. *Are they still . . . do you think they are going to try it again . . . ?* Such questions aren't often asked directly, but they lie nevertheless behind every newspaper story one reads about the problems of unification or the decision to send troops to Bosnia. "Germany Wants to Be Normal," as a headline in the *Herald Tribune* puts it, "but History Keeps Getting in the Way." And it is because history keeps on getting in the way that nearly all travel books about Germany date from before the war, when the country was still presumed to be "normal." If, as Colin Thubron has argued, travel writing is in some sense the province of amateurs, then Germany has been a place for the professionals called journalists.

Of course the boundary between journalism and travel writing is porous, and a single sentence of Jane Kramer's can serve to illustrate both the difference between them and the difficulty of fixing that border: "One morning in Berlin this spring, on my way to an interview with a city planner, I stopped at the new Galeries Lafayette, in the east of the city on Friedrichstrasse, to pick up a croissant at the basement supermarket." The sentence slips smoothly from one gear to another. It's the travel writer who buys the croissant, and who in fact gets so distracted by the shopping that she's late for her appointment. But it's the journalist who finally does meet the city planner, and who stitches that interview together with many others in presenting a masterful account of Berlin's post-Wende reconstruction. And that croissant aside, the article's gaze seems entirely directed outward. Kramer exists in her own text only as a lens through which to focus, and not as a sensibility to explore; however much her personal crotchets and assumptions may tacitly have shaped her reporting, she never says, with Goethe, that she discovers herself in the objects she sees. Clearly travel was involved in the writing of such wonderfully informative books as *The Politics of Memory,* or *After the Wall,* or Timothy Garton Ash's *The File.* Yet their emphasis rarely falls upon a sense of place or motion, the peculiarities of the local and the discomforts of getting there. Travel in such books is utilitarian, and the accidents and discoveries—the serendipity—of the writer's journey seem almost entirely edited out. When Kramer walks over a building site, she invariably does so with someone who can tell her about it.

Still, that sentence of hers is indeed one sentence, not two, and that very fact means that the distinction between the travel writer and the journalist seems far from absolute. The one may rely on chance and the other on contacts, but those too can easily blur together. And in some ways the most interesting thing about these distinctions is how little they matter. The travel writer and the journalist each depend upon metonymy, and though

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they—we—may differ in our modes of handling them, those metonymies tend to be the same. As Italian journeys once had their required scenes, their obligatory accounts of Carnival and the Colosseum, so anyone writing about contemporary Germany has his own set pieces to perform. One visits a concentration camp and walks along the course of the wall; crosses what's no longer Checkpoint Charlie and tries to relate the two great emblems of the twentieth century, to trace a connection between the War and the Wall. Above all, one broods about history, about the burdens of a memory that provides, as Kramer says, "the most loaded politics" of all in "the new, united German state"; a politics that affects everything from urban planning to the country's citizenship laws. One writes with (or perhaps against) the belief that one must somehow "cover" the country: must go East to report on unification and the internal borders that belie the absence of other borders, must worry about unemployment and local elections—in short, about everything that the Germans worry about themselves. I suppose we could say that the very seriousness with which we write about the place is a kind of compliment, a tribute to its importance and centrality. But it's not the kind of compliment most countries would want, and when it's possible to write a good frivolous book about Germany, well, that will be a sign that its history is indeed behind us, that it is—once more? at last?—a normal country.

Travel writing can take many forms. It can describe a journey of adventure or discovery, of exploration and endurance—the kind of trip that involves physical risk, whether those risks are the product of nature or of politics. But the form of travelers' tale for which the Italian journeys of Goethe and Stendhal provide a norm—the account of a journey made in safety if not always in comfort, the tale that neither bears witness nor depends on reliable reporting so much as it provides a record of the writer's impressions—that kind of writing has always found itself drawn toward the picturesque. It concentrates on the exotic, the quaint, and the charming: on those sites, and perhaps those histories, that can most readily be turned into a highly colored and not unpleasant image. This is in a way as true of great travel writers like James or Chatwin as it is of magazines like *Gourmet* or *Travel and Leisure*. For most travel writing describes journeys that in some sense did not need to be made. And most such writing—chatty, digressive, relaxed—can seem neither here nor there, to borrow a phrase that has served Bill Bryson for a title. The words point to the sense of footloose freedom that so often makes both the prose and the journey itself look like a diversion from the real business of life; inconsequential, neither here nor there, even as they are very much about being either here or there.

Such narratives, as Paul Fussell has argued, often take the form of a quest whose goal isn't so much an actual place as the answer to a question. The writer sets off in search of knowledge, a search that serves in itself to give

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the narrative its motion. And this reminds me of Goethe's desire in Rome to "discover myself in the objects I see." The physical journey coalesces with an intellectual one, and the writer discovers not only a place but the meaning of his own experience. That emphasis does, however, ask the reader to maintain an interest in the writer's own sensibility; and as I write that sentence, I note the distance at which my diction clumsily tries to place it, as if to deny that this is precisely what these pages have begged of you. For in relation to Germany that emphasis still seems to me troubling, one that does indeed seem neither here nor there in a country where a sense of inconsequentiality is impossible to maintain.

Instead we feel the reporter's need to stand as a "reliable witness," to pursue "the inner springs of the subject"; we make the assumption that—because of the Nazis, because of the Great War, because it was the Cold War's principal battlefield—Germany not only mattered then but continues to matter now. Matters because it's a place to be afraid of. But does it, is it, still? Or do we now have the freedom to travel through the country and note, not only those places in which we feel the sheer consequentiality of its recent history, but also the "pure pleasure" of the ones where we don't? Yet as I write those words of negative definition, even as I confess my interest in what, at times, Germany doesn't make me think or feel, I have to acknowledge that I've been caught once again by the peculiarities of its past.

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ANDREW X. PHAM

1

I'm not sure why anyone would pick up a hitchhiker in the middle of a Nevada desert. A carpenter named Russell finds me thumbing along a dirt road with two dollars in my pocket and a gallon of water. He is one of those Vietnam vets who carry an odd survivor's aura of lightness. He drives me five hundred miles to a bus station and presses into my hand a hundred-dollar bill.

Your address, I say. I'll send it back to you.

Russell shakes his head, saying, Pass it on. There is always someone in need.

It is difficult to breathe as I watch him drive off in his old VW bus.

2

I'm not sure why I have come back to Vietnam. My family escaped twenty-five years ago. It has been four years since I was last here. Maybe I am hoping for a final good-bye.

I am standing on the muddy outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, here to see my friend Hoa. She is ill and very thin. Hoa claims to have gained weight. Eighty-three pounds, she says, smiling; not too bad for a woman of five three. And she claims her prayers have been answered: her itinerant husband has returned home, although with a broken leg. I see her thatched hut has acquired a concrete foundation, something she has long fantasized about. It is the last in a row of shanties clinging to a narrow dike built with

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dirt, sundered blocks of concrete, and rusty whiskers of rebar. A debris-strewn river meanders between grassy banks. Across the rice paddies and beyond the spindly power poles, new high-rises push up through smog from the ruins of Saigon.

Hoa and I were born in the same fishing village, on parallel alleys. Same grade school, same class. More than twenty years later, I found her at a Saigon inn. She was a maid, I a Vietnamese American. I had just completed a year-long bicycle journey, and I was penniless. Of all things, we had talked about *banh cang,* a specialty of our hometown made with nothing more than a few drops of scallion oil, rice flour, and thin fish gravy—a food so simple, so impoverished, that no restaurant bothered to offer it. We remembered eating it on the stoops of our neighbors' houses.

When I left, Hoa hand-washed my laundry without charge so I would have clean clothes for my American homecoming: a gift from one poor person to another.

This time, she is the one in need, so I have brought tins of biscuits, chocolates, powdered milk, vitamins, tea, painkiller. They are wrapped in newspaper pages whose headlines tell of the burning of Kosovo. I have also come bearing an envelope. Perhaps it will see her through her illness.

Hoa bows deeply, hands clasped against her belly. She cannot accept such a gift. It isn't my gift at all, I say. This came to me years ago. I tell Hoa about Russell. Then I tell her that these are honorable investments that pay in perpetuity. So we stand there, this small woman and I, in the dripping heat, smiling at the image of an old carpenter in a battered VW bus.

3

I'm not sure why I have come to Havana. After wandering around Cuba for a month, I'm still uncertain of what I have come to see, or if in fact I've seen it. Valentino, my new Cuban friend, thinks I'm mad, but he's an artist, and artists—I know—need drinking buddies, particularly the buying type. Besides, I am renting his sister's flat, a fourth-floor walk-up.

We're sitting on the roof, between us a bottle of rum, cans of colas in an ice bucket. We've been drinking Cuba libres since noon. Except for one thing, you and me, Valentino says, we are same. But you are in America, and me, I am here, always.

Valentino is on probation for anti-government graffiti. He also received six months of re-education for his last attempt to cross the Gulf to Miami.

He points out to sea, saying, Between those two buildings. Not far to Miami.

I don't have the heart to tell him he's sixty degrees off. Doesn't matter anyway.

Valentino paints good cityscapes of the real Havana—dark, sooty

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dwellings with skinny figures wandering sinewy streets. I traded my bicycle for one of them. Later, he told me he thought he'd trumped me on the deal: his painting—at best—was worth forty U.S. dollars; the bike, new, would cost $120. I had bought the Chinese contraption in Varadero at the Panamerica Tienda and logged fewer than four hundred miles on it pedaling around the island. I broke three spokes in the first ten miles, lost the seat in the next ten, got stabbed by the stem ten miles later. I shrugged: the same piece of junk sold for $65 in Vietnam and $45 in China. This news stunned him. Valentino is not old enough to remember pre-Castro decadence, so he has never known the true weight of the U.S. embargo. It is embarrassingly easy to shock him and his friends with little worldly facts.

Now the whole of Havana has become tenements full of people who do not deserve to live in them. There are blocks of skyscrapers, concrete buildings worn away slab by giant slab. The walls are rotted, fouled as high as a man can piss. Tradewind rain has made the façades as porous as lava rocks. Along the Malecon, white surf knuckles the rampart, taking off cement by the chunk. On the moss-slick embankments, bare-chested young men cast fishnets into the foaming water as girls in Day-Glo spandex look on with disguised interest.

Valentino's father, Martí, comes up to the roof for the evening air. He fought at the Bay of Pigs. Martí is hungry. He throws up his hands and declares that Communism failed because, although there is plenty of rum, there isn't any food. Too much drinking and no eating makes for bad digestion. Communism has given this old revolutionary an ulcer. I say, these days Playa de Girón is full of very fat tourists boozing on winter holidays. You know, volleyball on the beach, jazzercise in the surf. Martí laughs and replies that he wishes it had always been like that.

We pour another round, watching the sun going down behind the city. Across the channel, the citadel blooms against the sunset.

The hours have a fluid way of slipping into the Cuban twilight. There are no streetlights to hold back the darkness. Midnight approaches and people are still sweating in the heat. The streets are full of the voices of city folk walking by starlight. The rank, powdery smell of old dog shit, ground underfoot, rises from the pavement. On the crumbling curbs, invisible people sit and trade gossip, their cigarettes flaring like fireflies. Somewhere around the corners, young men laugh. Incorruptible policemen stroll the length of the night, but there is nothing to guard, no one to guard against.

It's late. I'm leaving for the States in the morning. I tell my friends that in Cambodia the motorbike taxi boys like to wave to Angkor Wat tourists like myself, shouting cheerily, See you in the next life.

Valentino tries to explain this to his father, who shakes his head morosely and says, There is no next life. There is only this life, and there's heaven.

Valentino asks me, Do Americans think that we go to different heavens?

You mean Americans to American heaven, Cubans to Cuban heaven?

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Yes, like different countries.

Probably, I shrug. American preachers don't say differently.

He declares, I don't think heaven has borders.

I think you are right, I agree magnanimously.

Valentino is laughing, I'm laughing. We're punching each other in the shoulders. Then he has an arm around my neck, talking into my ear, asking for a loan in this life, repayable in the next. Valentino has been after me for capital to kick-start one of his little business schemes. Something about buying bacon from one friend to trade for cigars with another friend, to be sold to tourists for handsome profits. It's hopeless, I've told him, everyone and his grandpa are already doing it. I get a dozen cigar offers daily. Still, I've been feeling like a stingy bastard for not forking it over, but I've done my share of Third World travel and know the pitfalls of unequal friendships.

Valentino insists he's doing this so I won't feel guilty when we meet again in heaven, guilty because I let him be so poor when I was so rich. I'm stinking drunk and feeling ornery. Valentino, *amigo,* I say. What makes you think I'll go to heaven? If I make it there, and you're still sore about the money, I'll be American: I'll just ignore you.

He grins, looks out to sea. It's a joke, but it's mean and it's odious.

Valentino hands me a present, a painting, a stunning off-hued twin of the one I traded my bicycle for. It is his liquid Havana, in taffy colors, splashes of sunsets. I am without words. I have yet to figure out why poor people are always giving gifts.

I surrender much of what remains in my wallet, but not as much as he needed for his doomed venture. I tell Valentino it's a present from an American soldier.

Martí is on the edge of his seat, grabbing my knees. He fight Cuba? He fight Playa de Giron?

No, I say, another war. Long story.

Martí, however, needs to know. What war?

I tell him that it doesn't matter. War is war. Some people kill, some people die, some people get rich.

Martí purses his lips, then relaxes, nodding. *Sí, claro.*

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In Iran

GEOFFREY WAWRO

In Frankfurt airport, I witnessed an unexpected phenomenon. The airplane that would carry me to Tehran was disgorging its Frankfurt-bound passengers, Iranians all. As they disembarked, the women stopped in the departure lounge to remove their *hejab*—chador, *rouposh*, and head scarf—and brazenly comb their hair before applying makeup and nail polish. Already I began to doubt the severity of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such backsliding in the early days of the revolution would have been punished by black-shirted "morals police." When my outbound flight was called, dozens of women irritably unpacked their *hejab* and put it on.

We descended on Tehran through a noxious haze of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, ozone, and sulfur. The famous panorama of the Elburz Mountains and snow-capped Mount Damavand is seen nowadays through a chemical fog that all but bleaches the peaks from view. On the ground, I was confronted by grim-faced women in black chadors who scrutinized my passport and then, very cordially, let me in. I exchanged one hundred dollars at Bank Melli and suddenly had more money than I knew what to do with. Wherever I went in Iran, a fine dinner set me back no more than three dollars, a long cab ride twenty-five cents.

The traffic in Tehran is deadly. Though the city contains the usual array of stoplights and signs and crosswalks, no one pays them the slightest attention. This is not like Rome or Paris, where pushy motorists clog the streets or nudge you off the pavement; in Tehran, *every* traffic signal is routinely ignored. On the first day, I was frozen with fear. By the last day, I had adjusted, and got around the way everyone else does, by making imploring eye contact with every motorist on pain of death.

I visited the former U.S. embassy, a vast, forested compound in the

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heart of Tehran, now occupied by the Pasdarans of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, commonly known as *Sepah*. You might think the size of the place connotes American neo-imperialism, but the British and Russian embassies—built on land deeded in the nineteenth century (when Britain and Russia vied for control of Persia)—are far bigger. The wall of the U.S. embassy is painted with angry slogans ("We shall mourn on the day that America praises us") and murals depicting the 1988 USS *Vincennes* shoot-down of Iran Air. Pedestrians and motorists hurry past these incitements without even turning their heads. Next to the gate, the U.S. seal has been chiseled off. When I peered through a crack in the gate, I could see that our embassy (which will revert to us in time) is in a sad state of decay. The building is thrown open to the elements, the steps are broken and strewn with gravel, the fountains are dry, the cypresses parched, the lawns brown. (There was a drought while I was in Tehran, and the city was cutting off the water in a different neighborhood each day. If your hotel was in the designated area, bad luck: no shower, no toilet, no tap.) A passerby hazarded that the *Sepah* are "probably" using the main building as a school. Another thought it might be a military headquarters, which is more likely, as the walls are manned by sentries.

Two days later, I waited on the tarmac at Mehrabad Airport, studying the plane that would take me to Kerman, on the dusty edge of Baluchistan. It looked like a Boeing 727, but cruder. I looked closer and saw that it was a Tu 154. Observing my interest, the pilot strolled over and invited me to join him in the cockpit, which was far roomier than the main cabin. (Iranian flights are heavily subsidized—a two-hour trip costs no more than twenty dollars—and always full.) The pilot had been a lieutenant in the Imperial Iranian Air Force before the revolution. Trained in Texas, where he learned to fly F-5 Freedom Fighters, he loved America; indeed, like so many of the shah's veterans, he *seemed* American, having absorbed our ways in the U.S. and in his dealings with the large American military advisory that was based in Iran in the 1970s. Like everyone I met from the shah's armed forces, he refused to criticize the new regime; he saw himself simply as an Iranian patriot, whatever the form of government. On our approach to Kerman, we flew at ten thousand feet over "Desert One," a speck in the Dasht-e Kavir between Yazd and Tabas where the American hostage rescue mission came to grief in April 1980.

In Kerman, I met my guide and interpreter, an Iranian Kurd and another ex-pilot in the IIAF. Ali had little love for the Islamic Republic, but, like the pilot, he was an Iranian patriot through and through. We drove two hundred kilometers to Bam, a sprawling walled city and citadel begun two thousand years ago by the Parthians. Abandoned in the early nineteenth century, it has been a ghost town ever since, baking under a hard sun against a backdrop of craggy brown mountains. The Pahlavis kept a small

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garrison here until 1931, and you can stand in the commandant's lodge in the citadel and look out at the bleak, dusty vista, experiencing for a moment the isolation and hopelessness that must have afflicted every soldier posted here. Since we were near the Afghan and Pakistani borders, we were continually stopped by heavily armed police looking for heroin and opium: soldiers in the Islamic Republic's war on drugs. Nowhere was there the least hint of *baksheesh*-seeking corruption; the police glanced at my U.S. passport and waved us on, smiling, without even popping the trunk. There are lots of Afghans in southeastern Iran; and Gypsies, whom the Iranians call *Kabuli,* believing them to have originated in Kabul; and Baluchis, whose straw lean-tos and campfires are scattered next to the road. During the Pahlavi years, the nomadic Baluchis were forcibly settled in squat, windowless mud blockhouses—mostly empty now, but still visible from the road—that look as inhospitable as the Palestinian camps I once visited on the West Bank.

Most of Iran is desert, though whenever I said this, Ali protested, waving at a blighted, glistering plain of sand and stone and pronouncing it fertile and green. *Desert* to an Iranian is a salt desert like the Dasht-e Kavir; everything else can be sown with dates, figs, and pistachios, and watered with sprinklers or with the ancient, subterranean canals called *qanats.* The villages we drove through are clean and tidy in a very un–Third World way. Each is placarded with the regime's cult of death: martyr portraits everywhere, almost always men killed in the 1980–88 Iraq War. A typical mural depicts a soldier lying on a bed of red tulips, blood gushing from a neck wound. The caption is in tall letters: "He is gone, what have *you* done?" It is interesting that these are not faded, weathered billboards, but fresh and new. Even though the Iraq War has been over for fourteen years, Iran keeps the memory alive. Death, gore, and sacrifice are the keynotes of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his hardliners, though the majority of the population, born or matured since the war, resent this morbid cult of blood and tulips.

From Kerman we drove seven hours to Shiraz at high speed in Ali's Iranian Peugeot. Iran has invested heavily in public works to solve the unemployment problem (25 percent or higher), and the roads reflect it: few potholes and smooth surfaces, though no shoulders. The drivers are terrible. Wrecks litter the roadside; we passed a semi on its side, steel pipes scattered like matchsticks, the driver hunkered over, grimacing with pain. As we sped along, Radio Iran announced a gasoline price hike. The first eight gallons would continue to cost twenty cents a gallon (far less than bottled water), but each additional gallon would cost sixty cents. My driver spat curses and thumped the steering wheel. Having pledged to right the wrongs of the Pahlavis, the Islamic Republic of Iran has created a kind of socialism. Gas is subsidized, as are utilities, rents, and food. In the cities, you see people lined up in front of state depots to collect their cut-price bread, meat, rice, and cooking oil, for which they are issued monthly coupons.

Shiraz—the most elegant and sophisticated city in Iran—was balm to my

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tired soul. Once famed for its vineyards—the Syrah grape originated here—it is dry now, but has other charms, namely its gardens, lively streets, and beautiful women, who, in much larger numbers than elsewhere, disdain the chador and appear in what I would call "sexy *hejab*": snug-fitting manteau or housecoat, scarf barely covering the hair, and full makeup. In fashionable Mullah Sadra Street, handsome young people rummage through clothing and electronics stores with materialistic abandon. I saw my first Iranian prostitute here, a homely middle-aged woman in full *hejab*. She was standing on the curb, engaging strange men in conversation: odd behavior, I thought, in this land of feminine modesty. My guide put me in the picture. All of this is proscribed by the prim Islamic Republic, but in Shiraz no one seems to care. Shiraz also has a plethora of "cafénets"—Internet cafés. When I called up Yahoo mail in one of them, I found that my Iranian predecessor had forgotten to close his mailbox. I curiously scanned the subjects of *his* messages: "Where the girls are," "How to meet single women," "Sex, sex, sex." The mullahs are in a losing battle with human nature, and they know it. The editors of Tehran's English-language dailies—*Iran News* and *Tehran Times*—rail every day against sensuality, decadence, consumerism, and Westernization, and vow (unconvincingly) to extirpate all four with the Islamic life. Meanwhile, the newsmen on the front pages write only of the economy, a daily lament about high unemployment, low living standards, and the interminable recession. With its young population, Iran needs eight hundred thousand new jobs a year, but it is falling short. Unless they fix the economy, the mullahs will be in trouble. But they can't fix the economy without opening to the West, which would bury the Islamic Republic under Gaps and Blockbusters. This is why Iran goes nowhere, throttled by its internal contradictions.

On the outskirts of Shiraz I visited the military museum, which is really the last Pahlavi's gun collection on public display. Shah Muhammed Reza, who reigned from 1941 to 1979, was obsessed to an unnatural degree with weapons. I'd known that he personally ordered every piece of hardware for the imperial armed forces (after hungrily devouring the catalogs of the foreign manufacturers), but I hadn't known that he collected examples of virtually every rifle and sidearm made in the world from the eighteenth century to 1979. The museum is also interesting for its ideological *Schlamperei:* labels mentioning or even exalting the shah have not been changed; they are yellowing to dust, alongside curling photos of the shah and his jackbooted colonels supervising the construction of the museum in the 1960s.

To stand in the palace of Darius I at Persepolis and look out at the vast sweep of fields and mountains is to grasp the vastness of the Persian Empire. As for Persepolis, a capital built by the Achaemenians for the purpose of entertaining vassal nations and accepting their tribute, one wonders how Alexander the Great even found the place, let alone conquered it. It

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is a spectacular site; the ruins are better at Ephesus, but nowhere will you see bas-reliefs like these. They are twenty-five hundred years old, but as clean as if they had been carved yesterday. Most depict the subject nations—Parthians, Bactrians, Arabs, Thracians, and many others—paying homage to the Achaemenians, who ruled Iran from 559 to 330 B.C. and are best remembered by their first names: Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, all but Cyrus entombed in the cliffs around Persepolis. One of the more remarkable aspects of modern Iran is how no one entertains irredentist claims to any of the "lost provinces," whether in Africa or Europe, or closer to home in Iraq, Turkmenistan, or Afghanistan. Indeed, there was an international outcry—and much internal groaning—when Shah Muhammed Reza went to Pasargadae in 1971 to visit Cyrus's tomb. Since his homage to the first Achaemenian—"you are sleeping, we are awake"—*seemed* to betoken a reconquest of the Persian Empire, even the Nixon administration recoiled. (The Saudis went further, demanding that Washington remove the shah.) But that was the stillborn extent of Iranian irredentism. Contrast this apathy with nationalism like Hungary's, where even today peddlers do a brisk business in maps that wishfully depict a reborn Hungary astride the entire Carpathian Basin.

No less interesting than the ruins of Persepolis are the ruins of the shah's notorious "Persepolis Party" of October 1971. Held to commemorate 2,500 years of Iranian Empire, the Persepolis Party cost five hundred million dollars at a time when most Iranians lived in grinding poverty. Passing through a cut in the barbed wire, I entered the old encampment, which is set up like a Michigan suburban subdivision, semicircular cul-de-sacs thrown out from feeder roads divided by exposed, dried-up fountains and water mains. The once-luxurious tents are still there, now rusted steel frames flying forlorn scraps of blue and gold canvas. Inside there are cracked tile floors, broken toilets and sinks, amputated power lines. The tents get bigger as you approach the grand pavilion, which stands erect and apparently intact. Closer inspection, however, discloses a Potemkin façade. The rear of the pavilion is smashed in, as if hit by a bomb or a tornado. Air conditioning ducts hang crazily; interior doors and walls are crushed, exposing expensive wallpaper.

It was here in the grand pavilion that the Persepolis Party's infamous royal banquet—the culmination of three days of excess—was held. Although the celebration drew only a B-list of dignitaries (Spiro Agnew, Haile Selassie, Nikolae Ceausescu, Jeremy Thorpe, Tito), no expense was spared. The Pahlavis flew in chefs from Maxim's of Paris and fed their guests ninety peacocks, stuffed roast lamb, truffles, quail's eggs, two thousand pounds of golden imperial caviar, mousse of crayfish tails, creamed figs with raspberries in port wine, and champagne sorbet made from the 1911 vintage.

By a marvelous coincidence, the British foreign office was declassifying all documents relating to this bacchanal when I stopped in London on the

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way home from Iran. I looked over some of the documents while engaged in other research at the Public Record Office in Kew. They reveal that Queen Elizabeth was dissuaded from going to Persepolis by her minders, who called it "an event too tasteless and dangerous for the Queen of England." The queen, eager not to offend the shah while the Pahlavis were weighing the purchase of 760 Chieftain tanks, decided to offer up the Prince of Wales. Prince Charles refused, actually claiming that he could not miss a few days of classes at the Royal Naval College. So Princess Anne and Prince Philip gamely flew off to attend what one foreign office analyst called "the greatest non-event of our time, a creation of royal despotism taking advantage of the bedazzled mass media."

Back in Shiraz, I successfully penetrated the Madraseh-ye Khan, a serene seventeenth-century theological college. I wrote in my diary: "I have wondered where all the hardliners are, and here they are." The *madrasehs* are where the mullahs train; most of the novices are between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. They attended state schools until the eighth grade, and now, exempted from military service, are spending six years in the *madraseh.* After completing their education with three more years in Qom, most will return to mosques in their natal villages or neighborhoods. If not exactly the shock troops, these are the foot soldiers of the Islamic Republic, the men who will flesh out the lower ranks of the civil service or grow up to be "Friday imams," embellishing their prayers with anti-Western, anti-Enlightenment injunctions.

As I strolled around the courtyard, admiring the architecture and mosaics, I felt eyes boring into me. The boys, who live five or six to a room along the second story of the stone-walled school, were peering curiously down at me, Ali, and two young Frenchmen who had joined us earlier in the bazaar.

"Where are you from?" an English-speaker called.

"America and France."

Shock! "We don't let Americans into Iran, how did you get in? Have they reopened the embassy?"

There was a burble of excited conversation. The boys seemed half-scared and half-interested. Gradually they descended from their rooms, many coughing and sniffling despite the summer heat. I was distressed by their appearance—dirty, rank, with sweaty palms when they shook hands—especially since this was the Harvard or Yale of Iranian *madrasehs.* I was reminded of Nasir-ed Din-Shah, one of the Westernizing Qajar kings of the nineteenth century, who deplored "the vermin-infested priests who lurk in the corners of the *madrasehs.*" These novices seemed similarly lousy, and I did find myself scratching afterward.

It dawned on me that the boys of the Madraseh-ye Khan might be a truer representation of Iran than the beautiful people I had admired on Mullah

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Sadra Street. They were from the villages and the slums, educated just enough to begin swallowing the Koran and the prejudices of their elders, several of whom glared at us before stalking away. They brimmed with questions that gave me some insight into the *madraseh* curriculum: "Why do Americans favor Jews over Palestinians [*philistines* in Farsi]?" "Why does America arrest people who go to Cuba?" "Why does America accuse Iran of bombing Khobar Towers when everyone knows it was the English secret service?" "Why did Clinton have sex with Lewinsky?" "Jesse Jackson had a girl like Lewinsky too, didn't he?" They said nothing to my French companions—not even thanks for succoring Imam Khomeini after he was expelled from Iraq—until it was time to leave, at which point (soccer being followed as avidly in the *madraseh* as everywhere else) they shouted their only words of French: "Jean-Pierre Papin!" (a retired player) and "Paris St. Germain!" (a team).

The mausoleum of Shah-e Cheragh is a holy place in Shiraz where the brother of Imam Reza is buried. Sitting inside the mirrored great hall, I saw my first *Sepah,* or revolutionary guards. Although their uniforms are the same faded khaki as the *Artesh* (regular army), they are invariably better turned out and sometimes armed. The *Sepah* are also recognizable by their beards and mustaches; the *Artesh* are clean shaven. During my two weeks in Iran, I never saw an *Artesh* in a mosque, with the sole exception of the Disney-ish Imam Khomeini shrine south of Tehran. But every large mosque had its complement of barefoot *Sepah,* fervently bowing and praying, kissing the holy objects, and never turning their backs to the shrines (a formality few others observe, since it requires one to walk out backwards). This is not to suggest that all guards, or Pasdarans, are zealots. The *Sepah* is filled the same way the *Artesh* is, with twenty-month draftees. Many are volunteers from the draft pool who request assignment to the guards; others are simply eighteen-year-olds forced into the *Sepah* to fill a quota.

I met three *Pasdarans* of the latter category in the Hafez Gardens of Shiraz. All were from Isfahan, all very nice and oh so innocent. They thought I was English because I had said that I speak "ingilisi." When Ali explained that I was from the U.S., one of the boys asked, "So does he speak English or United States?" These three had been drafted into the *Sepah* and were unhappy about it, mainly because so much prayer was required. Each asked me shyly to write or draw something in the little notebooks that all Iranians seem to carry. I asked them what they planned to do after military service; all three wanted to go to university, but places are limited, so one would be an electrician, and the other two had no idea.

In another park I met a nineteen-year-old in army uniform. He hated the service, but would soon be done with it. All he was interested in was Western music. He whispered the forbidden names as if letting me in on a conspiracy: Iron Maiden, Back Street Boys. I asked him what he knew about America. "At school and from the government we hear bad things, but we

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believe the opposite of everything we hear. We think America is great!" I asked him if any of his friends studied at *madrasehs.* "Thank God, no!" Who, then, attends the *madrasehs*? "Poor kids, stupid kids, usually from deeply religious families." What kind of government would he like to see in Iran? "Democracy . . . but I guess I don't really know what democracy is. They say that we have 'democracy' here, but it's not democracy, because it never matters what *we* want."

From Shiraz we flew to Bandar Abbas, Iran's principal port and naval base. It was a seedy place, humid and over one hundred degrees and filled with Afghan traders, who buy on the duty-free island of Qeshm on the Strait of Hormuz, sixty minutes away, and sell on the streets of Bandar at a slight markup. (I bought a toy for my son from one trader. He had bought it on Qeshm for fifty cents; I paid seventy; he seemed content with the transaction.) There were lots of junkies, strung out and passed out on the sidewalks. I assumed the whispering men who flitted past me were offering drugs, but their contraband was CDs: "Mariah Carey, Britney Spears, Madonna . . ."

After nosing around Bandar, we crossed to the island of Qeshm. You get there on Boston whalers that blast through high seas, slamming up and down until just about everyone is retching. Viewed as a strategically vital island in the shah's time, Qeshm seems little valued today, with a drowsy police presence and a few rusted coils of barbed wire along with its ruined castles and dhow yards. Still, although elsewhere I had been largely left alone, someone here thought to send two very Stasi-like guys who claimed to be from the Ministry of Tourism. They took me everywhere, right down to the water's edge, where I crossed to the island of Hormoz. There I saw no military or naval presence whatsoever. It is ironic that the last shah seized nearby Abu Musa and the Tumbs in 1971 on the pretext that islands like these could be taken in a *coup de main* by "terrorists" to block the flow of Gulf oil. I do not exaggerate when I say that Ali, the two Polish tourists who were traveling with us that day, and I could have taken Hormoz with our jackknives.

"Isfahan is half the world," or so the locals boast. I thought Isfahan a most disappointing city, but that's probably because it was even hotter than Bandar Abbas. It reminded me of Florence in August, the big central *maidan* or square crammed with rug and souvenir shops. Like Florence, Isfahan is famed for its ancient bridges, but the river has been dry for years, and it is strange to stroll across the bridges in the evening and not hear the gurgle of water below. Isfahan is also unexpectedly pious, like one of Stendhal's provincial capitals, where everyone apes the Bourbons and the clergy. Only in Qom do more women wear the chador. I toured Isfahan with an emirati from Dubai who now teaches at Ohio State. He marveled at the changes here. The last time he had been in Iran was before the revolution.

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Then Arabs came here to drink and carouse with legal prostitutes. This straitlaced Iran is as alien to him as a Puritan Las Vegas would be to us.

On the road from Isfahan to Qom, we stopped in Kashan. There I had a long conversation with Ansarian, a young mullah who teaches school in nearby Natanz. Ansarian was rather frightening; smooth and assured, he gave voice to the worst prejudices of the mullah state: "The American people are not the Great Satan, the American government is the Great Satan, your presidents like Bush and Carter." I asked him why the Islamic Republic represses dissident politicians, scholars, and editors if it is truly a republic. "We are a republic, but we will not tolerate anyone who does not respect our martyrs or Islam. All others, yes." Why does Iran ban Western films, television, literature, and music? "If it is sunny and you pull a shade across the window, is that bad? Westernization is like a plague of flies, and we are trying to put screens on our windows." Are you worried by the prospect of counterrevolution? "There might be some trouble like that, but it would be against God, so it would fail."

Several months later, in the aftermath of September 11, when American strategists included Iran in an "axis of evil," it was because men even more reactionary than Ansarian hold the levers of *real* power in Tehran. Though the Iranian people are quite mild in their cultural and political outlook, Ayatollah Khomeini and his successors have spent the years since 1979 inventing ever more ingenious ways to centralize power in the hands of Islamic hardliners. Technically Iran has a democratically elected parliament (the *majlis*) and president (Muhammed Khatami), but the Supreme Leader is free to defy them whenever he judges Islam to be under attack—a regular occurrence—and to direct the country instead through his security ministries and extra-governmental *bonyads* or foundations. Hardline defense seldom shrinks from the counterattack, and thus Iran, despite its friendly people, remains the world's principal exporter of terrorism, chiefly through proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas, which, over the past twenty years, have machine-gunned helpless tourists, downed airliners, blown up embassies, and incinerated hotels and community centers, all in the name of Islam. Surely state-sponsored atrocities like these merit inclusion in an "axis of evil," and, watching Ansarian's eyes as we spoke, I suspected that he too would be pitiless in the defense and propagation of his faith. He reminded me of the more fervent Terrorists of Year II of the French Revolution (Louis St. Just, perhaps, or Jean-Paul Marat), men coldly determined to lop every leaf and branch off the tree of revolution until all that remained was a gray trunk.

Leaving the gardens, I chatted with an *Artesh* and a policeman on duty at the gate. Both were draftees. Pondering my discussion with Ansarian, I asked them if they would fire on rioting students at Kashan University if ordered. They both twisted uncomfortably for at least thirty seconds before answering. Then the policeman said, "Well, they'd never ask us to . . .

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they'd get the *basiji* to do that." There are perhaps three million *basiji* in Iran, mostly fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds, though they can be as old as sixty. *Basiji* are volunteers—paramilitary boy scouts who are ultimately controlled by the Revolutionary Guards and used to intimidate or thrash restless students. They are the "minutemen" of the Islamic Revolution. In a crisis the *basiji* would be called to arms by the Friday prayer leaders.

Qom has always queered Iranian politics, the mullahs demanding a share of political power even in secularizing times like the Pahlavi era. The city is a bastion of bureaucratic Islam, redolent of Rome in the seventeenth century, full of robed clerics and functionaries in the service of the Supreme Leader. I visited Ayatollah Khomeini's humble house in a back alley and sat for tea where he had sat before his exile to Iraq and France. The Imam Khomeini Educational and Training Institute is an aggressively political organization masquerading as nongovernmental. The closed walls of the provincial *madraseh* close even tighter here. You don't see many mullahs in most Iranian cities, but there are legions of them in Qom. When Reza Shah's wife was insulted by a mullah in Tehran in the 1930s, the king drove down here in an armored car with four hundred troops, motored into the holy shrine of Fatimah, and slapped the offending mullah. Looking at the vast domed shrine with its army of clerics and pilgrims, I had an inkling of just what a daring act that was. Timid Muhammed Reza—the introverted product of a Swiss boarding school—would never have done it.

En route to Tehran we stopped at Behesht-e Zahra, the Iraq War cemetery south of the city. It is a heartbreaking place, as grandiose as the Omaha Beach cemetery, but more touching because of the way Shias display their dead. Most graves have glass cases with mementos, and, in many cases, a photograph of the corpse, no matter how badly burned or pummeled. It was shocking to see photos of smiling boys turned to legless trunks, their faces constricted with pain or blasted away entirely. Ali, who had served in the war, was reduced to tears. I remembered the assumption we all had in that war that the Iranians were "fanatics." Here I was reminded of their ordinariness.

After a brief trip to Mashad, once a glittering place of pilgrimage now dimmed by smog and urban sprawl, Ali and I found ourselves once again negotiating the impossible traffic of Tehran. Two weeks earlier I had thought Tehran a grimy Third World city; now it felt as luxurious as Paris. Northern Tehran is where the shah lived and where the rich still live today as well. The million-dollar villas of the old regime "petro-bourgeoisie" are now inhabited by bazaar merchants (*bazaari*) and other creatures of the new regime. Threatened by the shah's program of Westernization, which was opening their captive markets to foreign competition, the *bazaari* allied with the mullahs to oust the shah in 1979. The Islamic Association of Bazaar Merchants remains a principal strut of the Islamic Republic, for all trade

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great and small passes through its hands so long as Westerners are excluded. To hear the *bazaari* splashing in their swimming pools behind high walls three thousand feet above the suffocating streets of Tehran is to understand at last their otherwise inexplicable support for the theocracy. (Has there been another case in history where merchants supported priests in a revolution against "secularism"?)

Ascending from central to northern Tehran, we passed the ex-Hilton and the ex-Hyatt. I stopped at the former, a time warp filled with sixties décor and furnishings, like a set from *I Dream of Jeannie*: Naugahyde-padded bar, burnt orange shag rugs, lime chairs. The famous patio where U.S. businessmen sold their wares is crumbling, the pool filled with Iranian males in black Speedos who jerk to attention every time a (fully clothed) female crosses to the hotel.

Dominating the neighborhood is the shah's old palace complex at Saad Abad, where the Pahlavi White and Green Palaces are now open to the public. Ali led me inside with a guilty air: middle-aged Iranians still don't feel quite right trespassing where the "king of kings" once roamed. The White Palace is in the Nazi style favored by its founder, Reza Shah, the last shah's father, who was forced to abdicate by the British and Russians in 1941 because of his fondness for Hitler. It resembles nothing so much as Rudolf Hess's "Brown House" in Munich, which is, of course, not brown but white. Since the revolution, the bronze statue of Reza Shah that once stood at the entrance has been sawn off at the boots. Even half a boot is still man-tall, suggesting the Brobdingnagian proportions of the vanished statue. If the palace's exterior reflects the father, the interior is the son's. There are marble busts of Napoleon; wall-sized paintings of Frederician grenadiers; statuettes of the last shah on horseback with toga and broadsword, à la Marcus Aurelius. A Space Invaders machine squats between leather club chairs in the elegant wood-paneled billiard room. Upstairs there are two memorable sights. The first is the last shah's bedroom, a frilly, feminine place modeled on Marie Antoinette's Versailles boudoir. Since the shah and his queen kept separate bedrooms, this is a revealing detail. (In the Green Palace, favored by Muhammed Reza's father, the shah's bedroom contains no bed because the old Cossack preferred to sleep on the floor.) The second is the cheap-looking nineteen-inch Zenith television that reposes on a steel cart in Queen Farah's bedroom. I pictured Farah sprawled on the bed watching *Dallas* reruns while her husband, fifty yards down the hall, sat up looking at the pictures in *Jane's Defence Weekly*.

Later I sat in the tearoom by the guardhouse puffing on a hubble-bubble pipe—moist, spiced Egyptian tobacco inhaled through water—and reflecting on what I had seen. My deepest impression was of the gulf between the Iranian government and its people. Educated Iranians seem tired of the pieties and hypocrisy of the mullah state. How can a self-styled

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"religious democracy" wield oppressive powers of "public supervision" and still earn the support of its citizens? Young and middle-aged Iranians—96 percent of the population—chafe at the restrictions and often defy them. The "sexy *hejab*" in northern Tehran is even more advanced than in Shiraz. Cars pull up beside you playing forbidden Western music.

As yet, no one talks about a counterrevolution because of its cost and because of the absence of any counterrevolutionary organization. A coup by secular, pro-Western officers seems out of the question; the military has been effectively "coup proofed" by its division into competing forces, the *Artesh* and *Sepah.* Nor is there an obtruding political alternative to the Islamic Republic. Iran's first constitutional movement, in the early 1900s, was snuffed out by the military. The country's last monarchy disgraced itself through waste, corruption, and a secret police that maintained sixty thousand agents and three million informers in a country of just thirty million. The liberal Mossadeq movement of the 1950s was brought down by its own irrational flailing but also by the mullahs, who feared Mossadeq's irreligiousness and joined with the British and Americans in Operation Ajax, the coup that restored full powers to the last shah. In Iran today there is no obvious answer to Lenin's famous question: "What is to be done?" Hence people watch and wait, enduring their gloomy government for want of an alternative.

What seems clear is that Iranians are anything but "fundamentalists." None applauded the terror attacks of September 11. They are weary economic refugees with no place to go and few prospects. They judge their government corrupt and insincere, interested only in clinging to power. Most rate the mullahs as better than the last shah, but that's not saying much. And Iran's refusal even to consider a restoration of eighty-seven-year-old Afghan King Zahir Shah suggests that the theocracy is more than a little worried about the possibility of a Pahlavi restoration. The mullahs' concern can only have been deepened by the "soccer riots" of October 2001, when more than a million Iranians assembled after each of three World Cup qualifying matches to denounce the clerical regime and demand an easier, more secular government and way of life. In clinches like these, poor and poorly educated Iranians may rally to the Islamic Republic, which funds social services overlooked by the Pahlavis and gives meaning to barren lives through insistent Islamic propaganda and field trips to the Imam Khomeini shrine. Such people, enlisted in the mosques and the *basiji,* would probably obey the mullahs and attack the counterrevolution, if it came to that. The martyrs may yet have their day of blood and tulips, or the whole regime may pass peacefully away like Honecker's East Germany or de Klerk's South Africa. Or the Islamic Republic may right itself, pulling just enough support from the slums and the villages, the secret police, the *Sepah,* and the *bazaari* to get it through this crisis and the next. Iran is that unpredictable.

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Life in the Margins

From Brooklyn to Bulgaria

STEVEN G. KELLMAN

If doughnuts are nothing but sweet empty calories, their centers are nothing but nothing. Centers, held Yeats, cannot hold, but neither can distinctions between inside and outside, up and down, center and circumference. The double helix, on which life is built, is a Möbius strip that makes a mockery of centrality and finality. By almost any measure, save the esteem of its citizens, the Brooklyn I grew up in was a major urban center. If the borough had been an independent municipality, as it was until incorporation into New York City in 1898, its population of three million would have made it the fourth largest city in the United States. Its schools, libraries, medical institutions, recreational facilities, and transportation system were outstanding and accessible. George Washington had slept in Brooklyn, and so, more frequently and soundly, had Walt Whitman, George Gershwin, Ben Shahn, Marianne Moore, and Arthur Miller. Unique among geographical jurisdictions smaller than a city, Brooklyn even had its own major league baseball team, something not even metropolitan upstart Los Angeles could claim, until 1957.

Yet Brooklyn, along with the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island, was and is known as one of the "outer boroughs," a mere foyer and foil to glamorous Manhattan. "New York, New York, it's a wonderful town," explain three furloughed sailors, functioning as singing cartographers, in the musical *On the Town*. "The Bronx is up and the Battery's down." Down south below even the Battery, the tip of Manhattan, lies invisible Brooklyn. George M. Cohan

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crooned, "Give my regards to Broadway," but neglected to offer his respects to Brooklyn, which occupies all of what, in a gesture of specious majesty, is called Kings County. When someone from my native borough states, "I'm going to the City," there is no ambiguity about which city or about the fact that, though its citizens cast decisive votes in New York City elections, Kings County is a dispensable stem on the Big Apple. "One of the longest journeys in the world is the journey from Brooklyn to Manhattan," observed Norman Podhoretz, aware that it takes more than a subway token to move from margin to center.

When I left Brooklyn I moved west, far past the last stop of the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority, to lands where egg creams and bialys are more exotic than guanabana. Saul Steinberg's infamous Gothamocentric *New Yorker* cartoon would suggest that venturing beyond the Hudson is like sailing off the edge of the world. So moving beyond the Mississippi took me beyond beyond the pale. I have lived in Bemidji, Minnesota, which registers on Americans' radar, if at all, during winter mornings when it is the coldest spot in the lower forty-eight, and in Irvine, California, a freeway exit amid Orange County's formless sprawl. For most of the past three decades, I have lived deep in the heart of Texas, in a metropolis that is neither Dallas nor Houston. If one measure of centrality is how a place is identified, consider that whenever the nation's eighth largest city is mentioned in news reports, it is always "San Antonio, Texas." Neither Cleveland nor Milwaukee nor Pittsburgh needs to be cited with its state.

If all the world's a stage, some nations stand, by chance or choice, in the wings, playing the role of supernumerary to the superpower. It is a lighter burden to carry the spears than to have to hurl them. Those who lurk on the periphery gain an edge over centrists, who lack a corner in which to hide. Consider Canada: an entire nation dedicated to the principle that it is not the United States. Vancouver is not San Francisco, Windsor is not Detroit, and Toronto is not New York, though it is pleased to serve as its cinematic doppelgänger for frugal moviemakers who stay within budget by disguising Yonge Street as Sixth Avenue. For Canadians, stretched along a long southern border, skirting the center is, more than slapping a hockey puck, the national pastime. Why would a country call its states provinces if it did not embrace provincialism? The second largest sovereignty in the world, Canada is small-time in a big way.

In 1980, I spent five months in Tbilisi, Georgia, teaching at a university in what was then the hinterlands of the Soviet Union. Though more people live in Tbilisi than in Tallahassee or Trenton, the capitals of Florida and New Jersey are more recognizable to outsiders—which is to say insiders, those who occupy the spheres of greatest earthly influence. CNN broadcasts to the world from Atlanta, Georgia; the other Georgia is a feebler transmitter. Georgians, who speak a language unrelated to any other in the world, pride themselves on their rich ancient culture, which they deem

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superior to that of the barbarian Russian interlopers who whitewashed the murals of their churches and attempted to outlaw Georgian from the classrooms of the Caucasus. But even during the Soviet era, children in Tbilisi grew up knowing long passages of Shota Rustaveli's medieval *Knight in Panther's Skin* by heart and assuming that their national epic was as renowned a contribution to world literature as works by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, and Proust. They were mistaken. Rustaveli would not even figure in a list of the 10,000 most famous authors, though he should, and, if he had lived closer to the centers of cultural power, he would.

A verdant corridor between Europe and Asia, Georgia has been host and hostage to wave after wave of travelers, plunderers, and usurpers. While resenting the Soviet interregnum that ended in 1991, Georgians tend to regard their former Kremlin overlords as yet another horde of failed invaders. Having survived the Mongols, Arabs, Saracens, Persians, and Turks, Georgians knew they would outlast the Russians. In the process, they reaffirmed their carrefour consciousness, their pride in enduring as a distinct and vibrant culture despite being placed in medias res. Like Lebanon, Poland, and Vietnam, Georgia takes heart from the thought that it is a crossroads enriched rather than destroyed by countless crossings. For all the world, these are the boondocks; but crossroad cultures like that of Georgia are also situated at the center. By contrast, efforts to determine the imaginary demographic midpoint of the United States often lead to an empty prairie acre. Tbilisi demonstrates that it is possible to be a center without being the focus.

Over in the Balkans, at once the epicenter of history and its distant periphery, there is a calm at the eye of the storm, a blind spot where all the gazes cross. It is not Belgrade or Sarajevo or Srebenica, cynosures of ethnic strife. In September 2000, I traveled to Sofia, which, though located at the midpoint of the Balkan Peninsula, almost equidistant between the Adriatic and Black Seas, is a forgotten metropolis of about 1,300,000. Named from the Greek word for wisdom, Sofia is Europe's unknown capital, an uncertain redoubt against the Enlightenment. Unlike Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London, "unreal" cities cited by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land,* Sofia is a real city, one that inhabits the imagination of few but its own inhabitants. Bulgaria's charming second-largest city and its former capital, Plovdiv (population 500,000), is too obscure even for the inventory of TV quiz show savants.

Now that Albania has exploded into international awareness with political revolution and economic collapse, and Slovenia and Croatia stepped away from Yugoslavia to take their separate bows, Bulgaria is probably the continent's most unfamiliar country. It, too, is a carrefour nation, one that has withstood incursions and appropriations by numerous interlopers. "When you come to a fork in the road," declared Yogi Berra, "take it." Thra-

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cians, Romans, Khazars, Celts, Goths, Huns, Byzantines, Tatars, Greeks, Turks, Germans, and Russians have taken roads into and through Bulgaria. Yet no one can take the Balkans for granted, even by confusing them with the Baltics. Though it is the nexus between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam, modernity and antiquity, ill-paved Bulgaria is off the beaten track, a country in which not even Canada bothers to maintain an embassy. Simeon II—who governs under the mufti moniker Simeon Saxecoburggotski—is at once the heir to the abandoned Bulgarian throne and the nation's newly elected prime minister. Though a Balkan equivalent of both Prince Charles and Tony Blair, he could probably ice-skate at Rockefeller Center without arousing a single paparazzo.

Despite the return of its royal pretender from a fifty-five-year exile, Bulgaria is hemorrhaging Bulgarians, losing many of the best and brightest of its residents (8.2 million and counting down) to the lure of Western centers. Its youngest have been scraped away by curettes; from 1995 to 1998, abortions outnumbered births in Bulgaria. A connoisseur of margins, I sipped the Bulgarian backwaters during a semester at the University of Sofia, where English, the language of Shakespeare and Melville but also of the dollar bill, is a popular subject. It was a season in both paradise and perdition. According to Greek legend, Orpheus, master of the enchanted lyre, inhabited what is now Bulgaria, but, attempting to retrieve his beloved Eurydice, went to hell. An American who visits Bulgaria must cross the Stygian borders, must move from the metropolis into the sticks.

Casual travelers to Ultima Thule who expect to discover the there that is there must settle for specters of themselves. A Texan at Masada sees shadows of the Alamo. Bulgarians speak a Slavic tongue that, while also kin to Croatian, Czech, and Polish, is, like Russian, Serbian, and Ukrainian, written in the thirty-letter alphabet derived from the forty-eight characters concocted by Saints Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century to accommodate their translation of the Bible. Bulgarian is said to be closer to the primal Slavic language, Old Church Slavonic, than any of its cousins. But even major universities in the United States that teach Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian rarely offer courses in Bulgarian. I knew enough Russian to read Sofia street signs in Cyrillic, but because I never became fluent or even comfortable in Bulgarian, whatever I encountered in the Balkans had to be refracted through the syntax of prosperous America. And it was hard to translate the quiet desperation of a society where the average monthly income is barely $100 and the (official) unemployment rate is 15 percent into the sanguine language of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horatio Alger, and Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders. In Bulgaria, nodding one's head means no; shaking it means "yes." A newcomer unfamiliar with the contrary way in which Bulgarians use their heads to approve and refuse could easily run into trouble. It would be like innocently scratching your own earwax at an auction and discovering you owed $20,000 for an urn you did not want.

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While cheerfulness is a particularly American obsession, as if we feel forever compelled to test whether national buoyancy really does float, it is not just compatriots of Walt Whitman and Norman Vincent Peale who nod. Moving the noggin up and down is near universal as a mark of assent. I know of no country other than Bulgaria where the semiotics of head signals are so dramatically reversed. Bulgarians I queried in a café were as puzzled by the phenomenon as I—inclined to shake my head in disbelief, except that the waiter might interpret that as affirmation and bring me an unwanted shot of *rakia.* Of course, Bulgarians who have been exposed to foreigners know how to transpose their head movements, which only adds to the confusion, since you can never be certain whether they are trying to accommodate a visitor's comprehension when they nod, or are using their heads as they ordinarily do.

Acknowledging the influence of the carrefour culture, one theory holds that Bulgarians are deliberately perverse, perhaps in order to set themselves apart from all the nations that have tried to dominate, absorb, or destroy them. It is worth noting that their southern—sometimes hostile—neighbors, the Greeks, say *da* when they mean no, and that Bulgarians, and other Slavic speakers, say *da* when they mean yes. They say *kartof,* and I say potato, but divergence over whether something affirms or denies is much more fundamental than a mere difference in vocabulary. It probably does not encourage concord within the contentious Balkans.

The lands beyond the western coast of the Black Sea have long been both the black hole of geopolitics, sucking in global energies, and a vast volcanic operation grinding things down and spewing them outward. The Balkans are a laboratory for gauging the operations of both centripetal and centrifugal force. Throughout recent history—including the Russo-Turkish War of 1878, the Great War triggered at Sarajevo in August 1914, and the NATO bombings of Serbia in 1998—the outside world has been drawn violently into the peninsula, at the same time that the area's proclivity toward fragmentation has given the world the verb *to balkanize.* Splintering off along with the rest of Croatia, Split, a lovely town on the Dalmatian Coast, has lived up to its fractious name. When I visited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1990, a year before that hybrid concoction began to come undone, citizens were vaunting their success at maintaining interethnic amity—harmony among disparate languages, religions, and cultures. Today the former Yugoslavia lies in shatters, and Belgrade, its Serbian center, cannot hold even Montenegro much longer. At the margins, Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Sarajevo provide alternative hubs; though, in the incessant cotillion from center to margin back to center, Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia all seek entry back into the middle, as members of the European Union.

Bulgaria does not seem on the verge of disintegration, though it, too, boasts of harmonious heterogeneity. In the case of the Jews, it has just

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cause. During World War II, Bulgaria, alone of all the European countries under German domination, saved virtually its entire Jewish population, which numbered about 50,000. Though formally aligned with Berlin against the Allies, Bulgaria's Tsar Boris, the grandson of a German aristocrat, refused to deport native Bulgarian Jews to the death camps in Poland. Could anti-anti-Semitism have succeeded in Bulgaria when it failed in Holland and Hungary, because, after slyly nodding its collective head to plans for the Final Solution, Bulgaria of course did nothing?

However, another marginal group, 550,000 Roma, or Gypsies, live on the perimeters of respectable society, in largely squalid quarters, excluded from opportunities for education, health care, and employment. Outsiders to their outcast community most often see the Roma begging on the streets of larger cities. Even educated Bulgarians, who would never disparage any other group, feel no compunction about reviling the pariah Roma. Nor are about 800,000 ethnic Turks integrated into Bulgarian society. Though the ancien régime of the Stalinist ruler Todor Zhivkov—who, until toppled in 1989, held power for thirty-five years—did promote assimilation, the terms were both callous and coercive. In 1985, when Turks were ordered to adopt Bulgarian names and to cease speaking Turkish in public, about 350,000 fled to Turkey. Many have since returned, but, though male Muslim circumcision is no longer forbidden, election to parliament of members of the Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms testifies both to the community's new clout and to a continuing need to defend its interests.

Wariness toward the large Turkish presence, concentrated in the northeast and east, is a legacy of almost six centuries in which Bulgaria served as an involuntary outpost of the Ottoman Empire. So, too, is mistrust of the 250,000 Pomaks, descendants of Bulgarians who converted to Islam under Ottoman control. Yet majority Bulgarians themselves remain the Pomaks of European culture, shunned and stigmatized. Until last year, most of their neighbors demanded special visas from Bulgarian travelers, and the derivation of the word *bugger* from *Bulgaria*—dating from a time when the nation harbored heretic Bogomils, ostracized from the heart of Christendom—is a continuing linguistic mark of Cain. More recently, Bulgaria was, without proof, widely believed complicit in the shooting of Pope John Paul II. The fact that Bulgaria was once itself a mighty empire has left its residue a nation of ironists. In 1014, after decisive defeat by Byzantium at the Battle of Belasitsa, 15,000 Bulgarian soldiers had their eyes put out. Can any Bulgarian gaze at the historical pageant of momentary dominions without a tinge of brutal melancholy?

During Slobodan Milosevic's attempts to create a "Greater Serbia," Bulgaria—the Nebraska of the Balkans—willingly served as a flyover zone for NATO bombers. The loss of Yugoslavia as a trading partner and the general leeriness of foreign investors toward the entire region devastated the Bulgarian economy. Massive investment has been promised to help rebuild

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Serbia, but Bulgaria, still ignored by outside powers, sees itself the victim of a victory that, hoping to propitiate wealthy Western nations, it supported. An editorial in a Sofia newspaper jested that Bulgaria might attract preemptive foreign aid if it simply declared war against Romania, with whom it squabbles across the Danube. But Bulgaria chose the wrong side in both World War I and World War II, and fighting for itself, even against a depleted neighbor, would not be a prudent option.

Russia fought, successfully, to free Bulgaria from Turkish rule in 1878. In Sofia, a huge white sandstone obelisk, called Ruski Pametnik, memorializes the 200,000 Russian soldiers who died liberating fellow Slavs; and, fourteen meters above the street outside Bulgaria's National Assembly, a statue of Tsar Alexander II, the Russian monarch who led the liberation, sits astride his horse. Though it follows the rites not of Russian Orthodoxy but of Bulgarian Orthodoxy, an independent and indigenous church, Sofia's monumental Alexander Nevsky Cathedral was built and named to honor the Russian "Tsar Liberator" and his patron saint. One of the country's most impressive structures, the neo-Byzantine cathedral proclaims Bulgaria's religious autonomy at the same time that it concedes subservience. No one would imagine naming Philadelphia's Independence Hall after the Marquis de Lafayette, for all his help during the American Revolution. Things are done differently in nations on the margins.

For most of the Cold War, Bulgaria, devoid of those occasional rowdy episodes that thrust Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland into the spotlight, was the most reliable member of the Warsaw Pact. When the Soviet empire crumbled and glasnost spread even to Sofia, the first fair elections returned the Communists—elected as the Bulgarian Socialist Party—to power in 1990. Unlike Romania's Nicolae Ceausescu and Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, Georgi Dimitrov and then Todor Zhivkov followed the Kremlin line, a sturdy streetcar for carrying Bulgaria to the fringes of international attention. Though it is now defaced by graffiti and ignored or reviled by passersby, the bronze Monument to the Soviet Army still commands the edge of Borissova Gradina, Sofia's version of Central Park.

Central heating is a Western frill that I did not expect to encounter at Europe's southeastern extremities. However, temperatures within buildings are indeed centrally regulated, for the entire city of Sofia. On October 26, radiators in every apartment and office in Sofia began to vent heat for the first time since the end of winter. The region was still basking in what Bulgarians, oblivious to the ethnic slur, call "Gypsy summer," and the only alternative to communal hyperthermia was to open the windows and keep them open for several weeks, until frigid weather finally justified the municipal decision. With central heating, as with the value of their *lev* on the world's currency markets, Bulgarians have reason to believe outside forces are driving their lives.

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Because ownership of a private car exceeds the means of most Bulgarians, Sofia should be a pedestrian's paradise, except that motorists are more rash than they are rare, and sidewalks seem to have been designed by cobblers, to drum up more trade. Within two days of setting foot in Sofia, I had mangled a shoe on its broken pavements. And what cars there are get parked on the sidewalks, forcing walkers to squeeze along beside them. To save their mortal soles, pilgrims in Bulgaria must tread warily, past feral dogs, pugnacious beggars, and street signs tagged for poets. In the North American metropolis, buildings, roads, and bridges tend to be designated with the names of politicians (Emily Dickinson and Wallace Stevens will never overtake John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan in the competition to claim airports, high schools, and boulevards), but street maps for liminal cities are a literary pantheon. In Sofia's case, cherished poets were also political heroes, indeed martyrs to the cause of nationhood. Hristo Botev died during the anti-Ottoman insurrection of 1876. Dimcho Debelyanov was killed in combat in Macedonia in 1916. And police abducted and murdered Geo Milev in 1925. These are not household names beyond the Balkans. The only Bulgarian to have won the Nobel Prize for literature was Elias Canetti, but when I mentioned the renowned name, even educated Bulgarians did not recognize it, perhaps because, though born in Ruse, on the border below Romania, to a family of Sephardic Jews, Canetti spent most of his life in England, writing in German. Among contemporary Bulgarian authors, Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov have the widest reputations in the outside world, but each lives in France and writes in French.

Because he was born in colonial Ireland, George Bernard Shaw might have been expected to write with sympathy for the periphery, yet in *Arms and the Man* he ridicules Bulgaria as an unhappy land burdened by the illusions of war and love. In act 1, Raina boasts about her aristocratic family's library, "the only one in Bulgaria," but we learn in act 3 that "it is not much of a library. Its literary equipment consists of a single fixed shelf stocked with old paper covered novels, broken backed, coffee stained, torn and thumbed; and a couple of little hanging shelves with a few gift books on them." Scholars who visit contemporary Bulgaria discover that its bibliographical resources have not much improved during the past hundred years. In 1759, four centuries after the fall of the Second Bulgarian Empire, when Voltaire was incensed by incessant wars between the Prussians and the French, he found it more politic to use Bulgars and Avars as satirical surrogates. Brutish Bulgar soldiers in *Candide* abduct the title character into their foolish and ferocious war against the Avars, and they rape and disembowel his beloved Cunégonde. It is all too easy to mock the hinterlands as outlandish, as Alfred Jarry did when, in *Ubu roi,* he assigned one absurd character to be the entire army of Poland, a nation that did not even exist in 1896, when he wrote his play. But a worse indignity is to be too obscure

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to be mocked at all. The vast, nasty repertoire of Polish jokes might instead have been Bulgarian jokes, except that jokers usually do not know Bulgaria from Burkina Faso.

Virtually every Bulgarian I know has a friend or family member who has abandoned Bulgaria, convinced that psychic suffocation is the fate of those who remain in the thin of things. In Bulgarian, *bolka* means pain, and, though the word comes from a different root, the Balkans are a zone of woe. "What do you like about this country?" asks an affable taxi driver, on the chance that a stranger might find reasons to dispel the gloom. Despite the vitality of Sofia's theaters and concert halls, the city appears to be wrapped in a permanent pall. "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn" is how Thomas Wolfe, who moved to the outer borough from Asheville, titled a famous short story, and there is a posthumous feeling to living on the periphery. Catastrophic derailment is often the fate of those who ramble off the beaten track. Humans are giddy migrant creatures, programmed to move to where it's at, even if "it" is the inane ritual of lowering a gaudy sphere on Times Square to mark the start of a new millennium. The only way to keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paree is to give the farmers full citizenship in the global village, through Coca-Cola, cable, and the Internet. Bulgaria longs to lose itself in the European Union, the agent that it hopes will rescue it from oblivion. "Unhappy the land that needs a hero," wrote Bertolt Brecht. Pining for a champion—even Simeon II, who returned two years ago from the Spanish exile he began at nine, in 1946—to redeem its afflictions, Bulgaria is an unhappy land.

And yet divergence is a force as powerful as convergence. A yearning to be far from the madding crowd burns within members of the crowd itself. "Nobody goes there anymore," observed Yogi Berra about a restaurant that had lost its cachet but not its liquor license. "It's too crowded." Grand Central Station, in the heart of Manhattan, is the site of both connection and dispersion. Planetary conglomeration—through corporate mega-mergers, NATO's absorption of its former antagonists, and near-universal membership in the United Nations—accelerates even as centrifugal force propels separatist movements in Abkhazia, Aceh, Catalonia, Chechnya, Corsica, East Timor, Eritrea, Irian Jaya, Kashmir, Montenegro, Nigeria, and Quebec. New York City makes occasional noises about separating from New York State, and some Brooklynites even plot secession from the City. Greta Garbo famously wanted to be alone, but fascination with such factoids from popular culture brings us all together. We measure out our days between the tumult of the Big Time and the stillness of the small time.

During Thanksgiving, the most American of holidays, I found myself back on what is, legally, American soil, at the official residence of the United States ambassador to Bulgaria. If representing Washington at the Court of Saint James's is the plum position for a foreign service officer,

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assignment to Sofia must be a prune. Nearing retirement, Ambassador Richard Miles, a veteran of the diplomatic corps, was not visibly pining for a final commission to Tokyo or Berlin. In fact, whether or not he would be eased into early retirement was still hanging on a few disputed presidential votes in some distant Florida precincts. But after dinner, instead of watching football, Miles recounted to his guests how he and his wife had evacuated their previous residence, in Belgrade, just ahead of angry mobs that sacked the building. The week before Thanksgiving, they had returned to Serbia for the first time, to hoist the same American flag they had lowered during their hasty, hazardous exit. People living in the periphery can safely count their blessings, even if they cannot savor them.

My departure from Bulgaria demanded a readjustment of norms. Emerging from the Balkan haze into a Texas glare, I found that American cars seemed too long, American grocery shelves too copious, American torsos too stout. I also found myself thinking about Dante's geometry of desire, a series of concentric circles that constitute hell. A conviction that she is trapped out in the circumference is what poisons Emma Bovary's existence; a rural girl with centripetal dreams of big-time glamour, she moves from her father's farm to Tostes to Yonville to Rouen, but never quite makes it to Paris. Urbanization, one of the most powerful forces in the modern world—propelled by the universal intuition that genuine life is elsewhere—has made Cairo, Calcutta, Kuala Lumpur, Lagos, Lima, and Mexico City almost unlivable.

Franz Kafka spent almost his entire life in Prague, the provincial capital of a disintegrating empire. By 1924, the year he died in exemplary obscurity, the United States had emerged as the strongest economic and military power on earth, yet Kafka never set foot beyond middle Europe. When he wrote *Amerika* (in German, the imperial language of Vienna, not the patois of either Prague or the shtetls of his own scattered people), he was so far out of the loop that he imagined Oklahoma lying beside the Pacific. But Kafka built a better mousetrap than any other author of his era, and the world, whose conscience his oeuvre catches, has beaten a path to his secluded doorstep. Kafka is the central icon of a shattered age.

Decentering is a crucial industry in Paris, New Haven, and other capitals of postmodernism, a radical church that denies privilege, as if every soul is equally aswim in the holy sea. Postmodernists insist on deconstructing the metaphor of nucleus and circumference, as if the Pomo Indians of the Pacific Northwest were as pivotal to civilization as Wall Street magnates. Though millions of hajis make their pilgrimage to magnetic Mecca, when Muhammad himself stood his ground, the mountain came to Muhammad. Even Sofia, Tbilisi, or Brooklyn can be Mecca. It can also be Mudville. The lesson of a season in a city named for wisdom is ambiguous. The only certainty is that wherever I choose to plant my feet, they grow toenails.

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To the Noodle Shop

A Love Story

RICHARD GILMAN

Now that nearly ten years have gone by, I find that the only things I can trust my memory to restore to me exactly are the weather and what it did to us: how hot it was that July day in Kyoto, how we found ourselves, even in the early morning, moving gingerly under the Japanese sun, holding on to our strength. (Forewarned by experience, I had stuffed little packages of Kleenex into every pocket and was working my way through them, mopping my face as we went along.) And I can bring back with precision the color and taste of the ices the two of us ate in one of our little defensive forays against the heat: mine was cherry red and a little too sweet. And hers? Lime green. But for almost everything else about that day I have to be wary of distortion, of the charming ruses of nostalgia; I have to be alert to the way emotions tend to invent their own surrounding history and marshal their validating facts from empty air.

All through the intervening years I had thought, for one thing, that the combined refreshment stand and souvenir shop on the grounds of the Ryoan-ji temple (some time ago I learned that "ji" *means* "temple," yet I go on thinking of the place in this fond, redundant way) was only a step or two from the celebrated Zen garden that had been our destination that morning. When we went back just last summer, though, it turned out to be more than a quarter of a mile away, along winding paths bordered by thick shrubbery and tall trees. And then the dress Yasuko was wearing that day: I've been recalling it as brown with large yellow polka dots, but when I tell her this, she says no, it wasn't; that was a dress I had seen on her at other times.

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Still, I'm not worried. Conceding those and other failures of memory, we're left looking for a different sort of accuracy of the only kind that really matters here, the weights and measures and textures of what she and I went through and felt at the time, and in that regard, the truth of the day holds up under all these mild falsifications. The essentials of what happened to us survive, having been distilled by both of us into a resilient legend.

I had spent two weeks as a lecturer at the Kyoto American Studies Summer Seminar, a program for graduate students and professors from five Asian countries. I was due to fly home the next day, and Yasuko, who had been my liaison and cicerone, shepherding me through the red tape and responsibilities of my academic and social activities and through the intricate unfamiliarities of Japanese ways, had placed herself at my disposal for the whole morning. "Where would you like to go?" she had asked me. "What would you like to do?"

I had remembered the garden at Ryoan-ji from my only other visit to Japan, three years earlier, when I'd been the American delegate to the 1984 international PEN congress. After the business sessions in Tokyo were over, we'd been taken by bullet train to Kyoto for the aesthetic and spiritual side of things—the famous Temple of the Golden Pavilion, the Heian Shrine, and then Ryoan-ji. Against all likelihood (altogether there must have been nearly a hundred of us in the group, and we were being hurried along to keep up with a brisk schedule), I had somehow managed to snatch what's called an "experience" at the garden—a quasi-mystical taste of serenity—and now I wanted to see if I could have another one.

The midmorning heat appeared to have kept all the tourists away and none of the temple monks was in sight, so Yasuko and I had the place to ourselves as we sat down on the wooden platforms that make up the viewing stand, she a row or two behind me and off to the right. (There's a scene in one of Yasujiro Ozu's movies where two men sit alone in this garden, just about where we were sitting and in rather the same postures of potential meditation.) Later Yasuko would tell me that she had not taken a seat next to me because she hadn't wanted her presence to disturb my contemplation.

I sat gazing dutifully at the seven moss-covered rocks of different shapes and sizes strategically placed on the raked white gravel. I was aware that some people have seen a mother tiger leading her cubs across a body of water toward an island, but that struck me as far too fanciful and anecdotal. The first time I saw the garden, I'd responded precisely to its cool and lofty abstraction, the thing I'd thought of as its essential Japaneseness: seven rocks, a bounded space, calibrations. But that failed me now. I couldn't empty my mind, distracted as I was by the heat but more particularly by just what had been meant to free me from disturbance: Yasuko's having moved out of my immediate presence and sight (I suddenly re-

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member a line from one of Eliot's *Four Quartets:* "Distracted from distraction by distraction").

After ten minutes or so, I got up and went over to her, aware as we walked off together of something new having been added to the stock of unspoken words that had slowly been accumulating between us. At the refreshment place we sat facing each other across a rough wooden table, a piece of reddish patio furniture, eating our ices and trading inconsequential remarks until, with my impending departure in mind, and suddenly feeling at the same moment a need to become serious and ceremonial, we set about exchanging farewell gifts.

I gave her a copy of one of my books, on the flyleaf of which I had written "For Yasuko, with admiration, respect and a great deal more." She was less self-centered and much less enigmatic; at some point I had told her that my favorite color was blue, and now she gave me a beautiful piece of handwoven indigo-dyed cloth, for which Japan, and Kyoto especially, is famous. The attached note thanked me for an enlightening couple of weeks.

And that was what our exchange of gifts was meant to commemorate: the stretch of time, really a very short period, during which we had been brought—or thrown—together out of immensely different backgrounds and circumstances, and had skipped over most of the barriers, or skirted round them, to find ourselves taking pleasure in one another's company. I had struggled to persuade myself that our time together had been no more complex or mysterious than that, and I wouldn't let myself imagine that it had meant anything more to her.

I had seen Yasuko for the first time one evening a couple of weeks earlier, in the lobby of a small Kyoto hotel called the Palaceside, across a wide street from the grounds of the onetime imperial palace, which has long stood grandly and morosely empty. The American participants in the teaching program—professors of law, philosophy, social studies, and drama (my field)—were being introduced to one another and to our hosts from Kyoto and Doshisha Universities. There were a dozen men and a handful of women. The only Japanese woman in the room, or at least the only one I remember, was introduced to me as a professor of English at Doshisha. In addition to more prosaic duties such as driving me around, she was going to try to keep me from bumping my nose against the many opaque Japanese customs I would surely run into.

To try to describe her as she appeared to me at that moment, I have to fight off the impulse to clarify, to make things much sharper and more memorable than they really were. And I have to fend off a complementary impulse to dramatize. She has taken on such stature in my consciousness, become so dense with importance to me, that I find it all but impossible to bring her back intact from that sector of neutrality and unspecificity she surely must have occupied before desire stirred in me and I began the

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process of turning her partially into a myth. And so I must practice a kind of archaeology on my earliest memories of her; to move more into line with contemporary intellectual fashion, I must try to deconstruct her.

I remember thinking that she was quite a lot taller than the average Japanese woman, which, at five feet four, she turned out only slightly to be. I remember guessing her age as about thirty-five and being thoroughly surprised when she told me a few days later that she was ten years older than that. But what I don't remember clearly, what I can't bring back with any kind of accuracy or with the kind of ardor with which I so often gaze at her now, is how she *really looked:* her present dear face gets obstinately in the way, even when I try to jog my memory by consulting a snapshot of her taken a week or so after that first evening. All that photo shows me is a different, more primitive version of the face I now know so well.

What does come back, tangible to some degree, are these details: a broad forehead and nose (so broad as to make her fail to meet conventional Japanese standards of female beauty on the grounds of lack of piquancy); Asiatic eyes, which we Westerners call "slanty," a word that with its implications of narrowness and a sort of slyness or slinkiness is grossly unfair to their beauty; deep black hair (I have no memory of how she wore it); a figure neither slim nor bulky. And then calmness, intelligence . . . although surely I'm giving her these qualities retroactively, for there was nothing substantial at the time on which I could have based such judgments. Not much of an impression, I ruefully admit, especially in light of her having long ago told me of her own much more positive first sense of me.

Even so, what I've just dredged back is too distinct; having been originally all too much of a blur, it's lent itself now to some sneaky refurbishing. I've been digging; for the sake of our romance, or rather on behalf of its "story," I've wanted there to have been at least a flash of discovery at the beginning, a flicker of amorousness on my part: some enchanted evening, that sort of thing. But it wasn't like that. The first stirrings, the little intakes of breath upon seeing her—those wouldn't begin for a while. We were together for not much more than two or three minutes, during which time I can safely remember being particularly struck only by the way she spoke English—elegantly, melodiously, with an accent very faintly tinged with a formality that indicated it wasn't her first language—and then the group eddied and swirled, and she was gone.

But here's something important that I suddenly recover from that opaque evening: never for a moment did I think of her as "exotic." Nor, for that matter, have I ever thought her so in all the time since then. Beautiful, yes, captivating, a natural aristocrat—I have a large vocabulary for her celebration. But "exotic" isn't part of it, and the significance of that in view of all that's happened can't be overestimated.

Exotic: literally "from the outside," "extrinsic," "foreign"; used often of

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plants, but also of customs and behavior. To think a *person* exotic is to locate the source of her appeal in a kind of narrow otherness—slanty eyes immediately come to mind again (as a young man who derived much of his sense of the world from literature, I had once thought the incarnation of exoticism to be Thomas Mann's Claudia Chauchat, with her "Kirghiz eyes"), and high cheekbones, or, moving away from the Oriental, the skin tones of Africa, or Nordic blondness, or the fiery movements of Flamenco dancers, or the lilt of Irish voices.

Still, for all its capacity to snare us, the exotic is a barrier to love, not a conduit for it; it separates as much as it connects. This is because if a certain kind of colorful difference is the source of allure, the object of desire has to be preserved in its seductive strangeness, prevented from revealing its secrets, which would mean a loss of power. And this in turn holds the admiring gaze to a sort of willed ignorance. But I soon found myself wishing to know much more about Yasuko, whose essential difference from me or, more pertinently, from the women I'd known, was located in far more profound mysteries than the shape of her eyes or the color and texture of her skin.

Classes started a day or two later, and I began to see her nearly every day. There was a little awkwardness, or diffidence, between us at first, and then we relaxed into something that any nearby note-taker might have described as companionable. On a day of monsoon-like rain, she helped me get settled in my guest house on the Doshisha campus. She drove me across town to my classroom at Kyoto University, where she sat in on each of my sessions and helped me, with a word or an encouraging nod, through snags in my lectures to a group of young Japanese professors and graduate students. When I decided to make a pilgrimage to Hiroshima on one of our days off, she got me train tickets and gave me directions.

She taught me things: that in Japan you never fill your own glass, but reach to replenish someone else's, as someone will reach for yours; that bowing is partly a matter of courtesy and partly one of maintaining little protective armatures of space.

Once she took me shopping for gifts to take back home. I bought for a good friend a lovely sleek stoneware paper cutter in the form of a stylized fish, and I got jaunty hats and red and blue happi coats for my daughters. Once we managed to have lunch away from the others, in a downtown coffee shop. She asked a friend of hers, happening along with a camera, to take a photo of us standing on one of the bridges over the river Kamo in central Kyoto. She's smiling noncommittally. I look quizzical.

Our conversation was full of unexpected pleasures, moving easily from smooth generalities to sharp little observations about people's faces and behaviors (ah, look at that mask, look at that knife-nose!), about food, about the life of the streets. We liked and disliked the same kinds of people, it turned out, and admired some of the same writers: Ibsen, Chek-

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hov, Yeats. I was surprised by the intensity of her love of Shakespeare, and surprised even more by the knowledge that lay behind it.

We each had an eye for incongruity and played off each other's wit. She found me bright, satisfyingly "open," and irreverent, qualities she'd been badly missing in much of the life that surrounded her; I found in her abundant kindness, together with unusual amalgams of wistfulness and strength, formality and suppleness. (Later we would make each other a gift of these early impressions and weigh them against what we'd learned about one another since.) Once or twice one of us (more often I) would let slip something that hinted at sorrow or dissatisfaction in our lives, but would then draw back, afraid of putting too much weight on what was surely going to be no more than a passing relationship.

There was nothing erotic or even romantic in what was going on—or so I fought hard to convince myself. Very early in our time together I found myself being physically drawn to her, or, to be more accurate, I saw how easy it would be to let myself be drawn, but I clamped down with great severity on such a dangerous possibility. When I learned she was married, with a daughter of fourteen and a boy nearly ten—information she gave me dispassionately, with no hint of secret turmoil—all thought of anything more than innocent friendship went flying from my head. For though at this point I didn't know much about Japan, I'd read enough to see that I wouldn't be well advised to jostle my way into so intimate a precinct of this fixed and hierarchic and conservative society; I had no heart for a sexual adventure about whose procedures, rules, protocols, and strategies I hadn't a clue. Besides, where in the world were the grounds for such an adventure if I decided to risk one?

The indications she had given me of growing fondness were confined to nods or words of approval when I said certain things, or smiles of pleasure at the discovery of our shared tastes. Perhaps I should include the rather more than routine energy she displayed when dealing with a logistical problem of mine or helping me through some cultural thicket. And now I suddenly remember that just the day before we visited the temple, she had made a remark that, had I been more alert, or less guarded, I surely would have interpreted as a clue to something deeper . . . and that might even have given me a premonition of what was about to happen.

We were sitting next to each other at the group's farewell luncheon, and for the first time she asked me how old I was. When I told her sixty-two, she hesitated and then said, "Ah, that's not too big a difference." I blinked, gulped, danced for a moment at the edge of this opening, and then blunted the peril of her words by giving them some innocuous interpretation.

But even if I'd been inclined to read a boldly amorous message into a remark like that, what was I to make of the way she punctiliously and (as far as I could tell) uncomplainingly took care of her domestic duties, several times turning down my invitation to have tea or a drink, or taking off early

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from some social occasion in order to hurry home to prepare dinner for her husband and children? And what about the way she kept trying to steer me toward a mild flirtation with another woman at the seminar, someone presumably more eligible? I resisted that, but I followed all her other cues to maintain a design of volatile circumspection between us, if you can imagine such a thing.

Except for a single occasion when I let something spill past the boundary lines I had carefully drawn, when an emotion broke loose, escaping my vigilance. She had driven me home from somewhere late one afternoon, and as I was preparing to get out of the car and say good-bye, I was suddenly overcome by a spasm of gratitude—for all her practical help, but also for something far more elusive (yet potent enough to make me break through my carapace of propriety) to which I couldn't give a name then and about which I have no clear understanding even now.

All I can say about why, without warning, I seized her hand and covered it with two or three quick kisses is that it was a way of announcing—to her, to myself, and to the air—that I had been feeling in her presence an extraordinary ease, as well as a sense of relief from my fundamental discontent: the baggage of failed marriages, loneliness, and anxiety about growing old that I had brought with me to Kyoto. I was acknowledging the way she'd given a quick home to my ideas about art and life; I was celebrating her patience with the character flaws I'm sure I'd steadily been revealing to her in the course of our controlled and yet strangely thriving intimacy; in that almost archaic, courtly action of kissing her hand, I was speaking, I thought, to an ideal of friendship, not testifying to any sort of desire.

Or was the courtliness, the gentility, a cover-up? I don't know. It was too soon to know. But I remember my heart pounding violently as my lips brushed her skin. Was that the condition of someone engaged in nothing more than a symbolic chivalric gesture?

As I recall the incident, she reacted with what seemed to me shocked alarm. She tore her hand away and left me stammering out an apology as I got out of the car. But she didn't scold me and she didn't show any anger, and that, had I had the wit to read it, might have told me a great deal. (When I give her this paragraph to read now, she tells me she was neither shocked nor alarmed and didn't "tear" her hand away. She says "startled" would best describe her response, and notes that she then quickly assimilated the "Westernness" of my gesture and even found it endearing. So my wits had been even duller than I'd thought!)

We left the temple grounds and took a taxi to the Kyoto Craft Center, a place where you can buy souvenirs and also see master weavers sitting at enormous looms making tiny complicated movements with their hands and feet. We watched for a moment. I bought a few things. Then we set out to walk in the blaring sun to the college guesthouse.

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It was a little past noon. "Would you like to have lunch?" Yasuko asked me. "There's a little noodle shop down this street . . ."

The place was very small, a counter with three or four stools and a couple of booths, the kind where you dangle your feet into a well in the floor. I had trouble with it, the way I often have trouble disposing of my feet and legs when trying to come to terms with the seating arrangements in Japan. I sat down sideways and, with effort, pulled my legs over until I could drop my feet into the space below the seat. Big, clumsy, aging American, I remember thinking.

And I remember too—with intensity, everything lucidly recovered—that a sort of agitation, a fretfulness that had begun at Ryoan-ji, was rapidly building up within us—in me, I was sure of that, and in her, too, it soon became clear. We couldn't have known it yet, but we were sharing an anticipation of unhappiness; we were on the rim of loss; we didn't want it to end. But we didn't yet know, or couldn't yet pronounce, what this "it" was.

Yasuko ordered *soba* for us, the thick kind of buckwheat noodles, and we noisily slurped them down (one of the first things she had taught me was that in Japan it's perfectly acceptable to slurp noodles), and all the time we were waiting and eating we made small talk, and we made some more after we'd finished, lingering over our tea, chatting about some of the people who had been involved in the seminars, gossiping, dawdling, stalling.

And then out of the blue, the bluest blue, without anything leading up to it, in a parachute jump of a remark, a leap into the unknown, Yasuko said, "It's a good thing you're leaving tomorrow." With a dull roaring sound in my head, like a conch held up to the ear, barely able to breathe, I crept up to this astounding statement, looked over the edge, and asked her what she meant, when of course I had sensed her meaning the moment the words came out.

"It's a good thing," she repeated, "because if you weren't going tomorrow I'm afraid I might do something foolish and irresponsible." She had already done something. She had disarmed herself, given up the conspiracy of silence she'd been maintaining, with me as a co-conspirator; whether or not it was foolish and irresponsible would take us quite a while to find out.

She would tell me later that what she said had taken her as much by surprise as it had me. The climax to that agitated sense of impending loss we had both been feeling, the only true means of assuaging it, had escaped her like a slip of the tongue, propelled by the pressure of growing desire and a corresponding despair that anything could ever come of it. She'd blown her carefully constructed cover. And so, without a moment's hesitation, sprung loose by her example, I went about blowing mine.

I told her that I was in the same perilous condition as she, that I'd fallen alongside her, the two of us having bounced together into the pit. I didn't use those words or that image, but spoke conventionally, in a rush. I said:

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I'm in love with you too; I've tried hard to suppress it and thought I had; I can't believe you feel the same; I'm astonished, elated, overwhelmed—I spoke like that. But beneath the language of romance, the stammering, intoxicated, inept words, I was joining her in an unspoken cry: My god, what a pickle we've gotten ourselves into, what are we going to do?

She looked at me as I spoke, then closed her eyes briefly, opened them again, reached for my hand, and murmured something I don't remember. Then she brought us back to earth, where we kept our footing for a while. She spoke soberly, even gravely, some such words as these, in her faintly formal English: You know of course that we cannot do anything about this, we have to let it go. We have to be mature and do the responsible thing and just treasure the memory of our meeting . . . we will both keep that memory alive as long as we can and then it will begin to fade and we will be as before . . . or almost as before.

Then, for the first time since we'd met, she told me about her marriage, about having lived for years with her husband in tense unhappiness, in emotional and intellectual isolation, and she spoke of her children, whom she loved dearly and greatly feared harming. Oh, how she wanted to fly off with me, she said, on the plane's wings and those of desire.

I had come along and given her the sense of another life. But she couldn't break up her family, she said, and so she would stay in the marriage; it was her duty. And she would stay within the formal boundaries of the marriage, too, observing its letter amid the ruins of its spirit; she wouldn't be an adulteress, even if she had any idea how to be one.

All the time she was talking, I was nodding in agreement while I heard everything that had just been given me slip away: an unlooked-for, miraculous chance to renew my life, the blessing of having my image in a lover's eyes and hers in mine. A great fist of forlornness was already knotting in my stomach, competing for space with an exhilaration that defied her words. And then I found myself being oddly comforted by an almost pleasant sense of renunciation that cradled the pain—how mature we were being, how fine we were going to be in our abnegation!

We sat for a while, whether silently or not I don't recall, more likely making a new, desperate kind of small talk. I remember finding it hard to look at her, overcome with sudden shyness, yet at the same time fighting off an almost irresistible impulse to stroke her cheek. (Plum cheeks, I later came to call hers, for their roundness, their pliancy.)

At last we got up. My body seemed to have turned rubbery, disobedient, so I had even more trouble extricating myself from my seat than I'd had getting into it, and while I was trying to drag my legs out of the booth, I remember thinking again what a big awkward *gaijin* I must seem. The surf sounds in my head were fainter than before but stayed there all through the ten minutes it took us to reach my place.

We lingered for only another minute or two on the front steps, and then

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we said good-bye. I don't recall anything about the parting except that we didn't kiss or embrace or give any physical sign of passion, certainly not of passion thwarted, for what bodily indication can you give of that? We might have had tears in our eyes; I don't remember. I think we looked at each other wonderingly for a moment, then she turned on her heel and was gone.

I went to my room, which was large and tackily comfortable, with a rickety shower and an even more rickety air conditioner. I set about getting ready for the next day's flight home. But it wasn't any good. I was sweating, restless with mingled sadness and excitement, and I must have been exhibiting some symptoms of shock. I took a shower, rushing to rinse the soap off as the hot water dwindled, and then walked around in shorts and a T-shirt trying to take stock of things. The door to a new life had remarkably opened and then, in an instant, slammed shut. There didn't seem to be anything I could do about it except to honor what had happened, and mourn it.

I went over to the table where my little typewriter sat and began to write Yasuko a letter in which I intended to let her know—at greater length and with more resourceful eloquence than I'd managed in her presence—what I thought and felt about her.

I started by saying that I respected her decision and would do nothing to endanger it. She was a good woman, I wrote, a dear woman whom I greatly admired. Then I told her of the sorrow I was feeling and how it seemed to me that if we'd met at another time and in different circumstances, who knows what might have been possible? As I wrote, I gradually became aware that the impulse of renunciation I had found so perversely comforting a little earlier was already beginning to fade, replaced by the rough outlines of a scheme of resistance. What if I didn't quite give up? Who knew what might *still* be possible?

I stopped writing and felt the tide turn in my head. I wasn't going to challenge her decision directly, and at this point I didn't have even the bones of a strategy for overturning it, but I wasn't going to surrender without a fight. I would do nothing to hurt her, and if her determination proved unshakable I'd go along, but I had to learn that she herself was testing the possibilities, and for that I had to try to keep things alive and open between us. Thinking this way, I sat for a while, swaying between hope and despair.

I was shuttling, too, between lucidity and darkness, between the tiny bit I knew about Yasuko and could count on, and the vast impenetrability of Japanese society. There was a mechanism here that was ready to crush me, a gigantic apparatus of laws, customs, values, beliefs, manners, the very air itself. Why did I want to get mixed up in it? The image of Yasuko, blurred around the edges—the full nose, the plum cheeks, the deep brown almond eyes—kept up a rhythmic appearance and disappearance.

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I sit here now, in the present, writing this essay, perplexed as to what to do with the thing that happened next—I mean, how to handle it narratively so that it doesn't seem outrageous in its timing, part of a tall story. Well, there's no way around it. What happened next is that there was a knock at the door, and when I opened it, Yasuko was standing there.

She was holding a letter, and, in a low, almost shy voice, she told me that she hadn't been able to accept the abruptness of our leave-taking, so after getting home she'd suddenly decided to write to me, to fill in some of the void that had opened. "But it's the same for me, I'm writing a letter to *you*," I almost shouted. Then, light-headed from the speed of the day's events, yet wanting to make them go even faster, I reached out, said to her—as she reminds me now—"Allow me," and kissed her, a mere brush of a kiss, a token, against which she didn't have any need to struggle. I stepped back and, as I remember, for a few seconds she stared at me; then without a word she turned and ran from the room.

There was no dramatic change of heart in her letter, as I had hoped. She spoke of how much she had learned from me and how she had delighted in our times together. And she told me of her sadness now. "I have a big lump in my throat as I write this," she said. I sat down to finish my letter to her. Emboldened by the depth of feeling in her own note, I told her I couldn't imagine that we'd never see each other again. A tiny tactical move, a little loop thrown out to the future.

Next morning, as the plane headed out across the Pacific, I leaned back in my seat and abandoned myself to my first fantasies about life with Yasuko, tentative, fragile, snatched from unlikelihood.

Editor's note: Richard Gilman and Yasuko Shiojiri were married in Kyoto in 1992 and have lived together in Japan ever since.

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Scatological Medicine

SHERWIN B. NULAND

Who remembers Serutan? In ads that began to appear about seventy-five years ago on billboards and public transportation and in the pages of periodicals, it was touted as "Nature's Aid to Elimination!" The very name of the anti-constipation medicine was *Nature's* spelled backward, a disclosure made in the text of every ad. As a boy who frequently rode the New York subways in the 1930s and 1940s, I used to wonder what physiological failure awaited me a few decades hence that would require a patent remedy described as having been developed specifically for use "after 35." At the age of nine or ten, I tried to guess which of the dour commuters sitting near me had failed to take their Serutan that morning.

Serutan has long since been replaced by a wide variety of agents that range from those "recommended by your doctor," like Metamucil, to the botanical therapies found in health-food stores. Though Americans are not as bowel-obsessed as some nationalities (most prominently the English), our annual consumption of stool softeners, laxatives, and similar propellants is enormous. In this, we differ little from the Sumerians.

In the medical annals of every civilization that has left sufficient records, there is some mention of the need to keep the bowels open. Worship at the shrine of the god called Regularity is common. Its worldwide congregation exceeds in size the total number of people attending church, synagogue, and mosque services on any given weekend; it is a faith whose scripture grows ever larger.

Before humankind discovered the earliest rudiments of science, medical symptoms were commonly attributed to supernatural causes: the gods were angry and manifested their displeasure by bringing disease. It has been much the same with Regularity. If he feels that insufficient or derogatory attention has been paid to him, he sickens the sinner with headache, lassitude, nausea, nervousness, and impotence—some of the results that early cultures ascribed to constipation. In more sophisticated times, such complex pathologies as tuberculosis, gallstones, and cancer were added to the list.

Of all the ancient peoples, the Egyptians seem to have been most attentive to the commandments of Regularity. Papyri depict a culture permeated with a rectal mythology that influenced day-to-day behavior and supported the equivalent of an industry. The putrefied effluvium of fecal matter, called *wehuduw,* was said to be absorbed through the bowel wall into a system of ducts that under ordinary circumstances carried a healthful mixture of air, water, and blood outward from the heart to the other organs of the body. Once in the vessels, the contaminant forced its way to the heart, and from there was driven centrifugally to poison every tissue. The various measures used to prevent the accumulation of *wehuduw* apparently became less effective as one grew older, so that many of the symptoms nowadays associated with aging were thought to be caused by its malign influence. Elderly Egyptians were believed to die of constipation as we do of arteriosclerosis. *Wehuduw* was the cholesterol of its time.

And what were the preventive measures? They appear to have been little different from the ones employed by many of today's Regularity worshipers. On three consecutive days each month, every person took a cathartic

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prophylactically. If more coprodynamism was needed (and very likely even if it was not), enemas were administered. In fact, the best available evidence indicates that enemas were invented by the Egyptians, for the express purpose of preventing accumulation of *wehuduw*. Care of the rectum became a medical specialty, personified in the form of a physician known as the Shepherd of the Anus, a particularly elevated designation in the hierarchy of Egyptian healing. His job was to guide members of the privileged classes, including the Pharaoh, through the process of effective elimination and to give enemas when indicated. He was Regularity's high priest. Among his methods was the anal instillation of honey under pressure, which was believed to neutralize the toxic products in the stool. Cease wondering about the enigmatic face of the Sphinx—it is doubtless the ambivalent response to a rectum packed tightly with the sweet golden nectar of the bee.

With the advent of Greek medicine, the doctrine of the four humors gave further sanction to the use of therapeutic intestinal cleansers. Though the toxic effects of feces continued to rank high among the theoretical causes of symptoms, it was actually the surfeit of the humors that most concerned the doctors. Powerful laxatives were among the treatments thought most effective against excesses of yellow and black bile, which were supposed to cause many illnesses.

But with or without humoral explanations for disease, a good clean-out remained, until fairly recently, an important treatment used by healers or as a home remedy. By the late seventeenth century, every sophisticated Frenchman considered the enema an essential part of his daily toilet. Many of the botanicals that were a mainstay of both the physician's pharmacopoeia and the home medicine box as recently as a century ago functioned as purgatives or emetics. Medical and kitchen-table dogma demanded that the poisons be disgorged in one direction or the other.

Like most of the medical and lay attacks on disease, the use of purges and pukes had no scientific basis. Though real science began to affect medicine in the seventeenth century, two more centuries would pass before the old notions of therapy were replaced by methods based on experimental studies verifiable in laboratories. And then, paradoxically, the very evidence that should have given the lie to the efficacy of internal purity came to be used as a justification for ever more vigorous efforts to sustain its importance in the doctor's quiver of therapeutic arrows.

In 1867, Joseph Lister reported his observation that infection in postsurgical wounds was the result of contamination with certain bacteria similar to those that Louis Pasteur, a decade earlier, had shown to be the cause of putrefaction in the wine and beer produced by distillers near Lille. The next several decades brought a series of discoveries that became the basis of the germ theory of disease. Sicknesses previously thought to be the result of bad air, bad morals, atmospheric events, constitutional weakness, or even the not-quite-discarded humoral imbalances were shown in fact to be caused by infestation with organisms invisible to the naked eye. These organisms lived in "the world of the infinitely small," as Pasteur called the realm revealed by the microscope. The elaboration of germ theory revolutionized medical thinking, determined the direction of research for the next century, and provided straightforward explanations for phenomena that doctors and grandmothers had been talking about for millennia. Among them was the profession's certainty—and the laity's, too—that constipated people are prone to develop debilitating symptoms and even diseases.

The scientifically minded physician—alert to the latest findings of the research laboratories—at last had an explanation for the pernicious power of a stalled stool. The bacteria seen swarming in the decomposing feces were doubtless releasing a powerful poison into the circulatory system. And there was another factor, from the emerging field of physiological chemistry: the demonstration that the breakdown of proteins in the feces released compounds that were often toxic. After thousands of years of vagueness, the problem had been solved. Bacteria and noxious organic compounds were the culprits.

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This convincing proposition was dubbed with a resplendent name that reflected the specialized knowledge its discoverers had brought to bear in tracking it down. Poisoning by one's own retained or reluctant stool was henceforth to be known as "autointoxication," so designated by a French physician and biologist named Charles Bouchard. To establish his priority in the field of posteriority, Bouchard wrote an influential book about it in 1887, *Lectures in Autointoxication.*

Over the next half century, a wide variety of methods—scientific, quasi-scientific, pseudoscientific, and downright phony—appeared, intended to relieve the scourge of feckless feces. Some of the names associated with the constipation crusades became household words: John Harvey Kellogg of Battle Creek, Michigan, who championed vegetarianism, corn flakes, and colonic irrigation, and offered free treatment at his sanitarium to those who were unfortunate enough to be simultaneously bloated and impecunious; Elie Metchnikoff, a Nobel Prize winner for his discovery of phagocytosis, who promoted the consumption of yogurt to restore the proper bacterial mix in the intestine; Bernarr Macfadden, who became famous for adding the bulky diet to his advocacy of strenuous physical therapy for vibrant health; and Charles Atlas, who decried the clogging of the anatomical area he called the "internal sewer" and insisted that his acolytes take prunes, figs, and three or four "internal baths" during their twelve-week muscle-building correspondence course. "What would you think of a fireman," his instructional literature demanded, "who continually choked up his furnace with coal and never cleared out the accumulated ash?"

But two stars shine with particular luminosity in the scatological sky. One was ultimately proved to be a fraud and a huckster, though it must be said that he did sincerely believe in the notion of fecal poisoning. The other was one of the leading surgeons of England, convinced that the battle against autointoxication was to be fought on scientific grounds and won in the operating room.

First, the huckster. On his arrival in New York from his native England around 1880, Charles Tyrell was hospitalized for the treatment of an otherwise unspecified paralysis. While being treated—unsuccessfully—he read a tract by a certain A. Wilford Hall, Ph.D., advancing the thesis that every disease can be cured or prevented by frequent flushings of the colon. Tyrell followed Hall's written advice, and was soon healthy. A few years later, he established a business called the Hygienic Institute and wrote a book about his newfound catholicon, *The Royal Road to Health.* The book was widely read, as were several pamphlets on the same subject; they urged patients to purchase, for $12.50, a colonic cleansing device invented by the author: the J.B.L. (for Joy, Beauty, Life) Cascade, which was to be used to administer a warm mixture of fluids (contents undisclosed) three or four times each week.

The new product was immediately successful. Testimonials poured in from all over North America and several foreign countries. Tyrell happily used them in his widespread advertising; business boomed, and people began buying the Cascade as a gift for friends, business associates, and even brides. Successive editions of *The Royal Road to Health* sold as well as the enema devices, and more than a hundred printings were necessary to satisfy the demand. A scientific gloss was put on the book after 1907, when Metchnikoff published *The Prolongation of Life.* Without consulting the great scientist, Tyrell used some of the book's arguments about the salubrious qualities of yogurt to bolster his statements about the importance of colonic cleanliness.

All of this was going on at a time when medical fraud was rampant in the United States. In response, the American Medical Association established a department that came to be called the Bureau of Investigation. The bureau soon began looking into the safety of the Cascade. Under the direction of its chief—the appropriately named Dr. Arthur J. Cramp—the bureau's investigations disclosed that Tyrell, a former actor who referred to himself as Doctor, had obtained his M.D. degree only in 1900, when he was fifty-seven years old, from a short-lived New York school called the Eclectic Institute. Though he had often stated that

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Mother Nature needed nothing more than pure water to clean out the intestines, his mysterious solution contained borax (a harsh chemical that can injure the intestine) and salt. A number of other questionable facts turned up as well, prompting the *Journal of the American Medical Association* to publish a statement warning customers about the product. Many of those who stopped the irrigations in response to the article were shocked to discover that their colonic function was no longer spontaneous and would recover slowly, if at all. But the AMA had no power to punish Tyrell, and more than a few of the suckers born every minute continued to use his product until the theory of autointoxication was disproved in the early 1920s, a few years after Tyrell's death as a rich man.

Arbuthnot Lane, surgeon to London's Guy's Hospital, was another case entirely. Lane was convinced that man's assumption of the upright position had resulted in the unnatural descent of the abdominal organs into positions in which they hung by their own weight, putting stress on the ligaments and other tissues from which they had once been suspended without tension. The stagnant passage of food and stool, slowed down by these so-called Lane's kinks, allowed the autointoxicants to be absorbed into the bloodstream. An additional factor in Lane's thinking was a concept then becoming current as a result of the rapidly evolving germ theory. In their inexperience at interpreting microscopic observations, most physicians believed that the intestinal tract's normal state was sterility, and that it contributed nothing to digestion. Therefore, they thought that the vast bacterial colonization of the colon was a pathological condition. To Lane, this meant that the theory of fecal stasis had been put on an up-to-date clinical footing. By 1903, he began to excise surgically all or a large portion of the colons of patients referred to him for the treatment of the many illnesses said to result from autointoxication—diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, gastric ulcer, thyroid disease, and epilepsy among them. In the following year, his judgment was substantiated by a meeting with Metchnikoff, who would later write in *The Nature of Man:* "It is no longer rash to say that not only the rudimentary appendage [appendix] but the whole of the large intestine [is] superfluous, and that their removal would be attended with happy results." Similar previous statements by other authorities had influenced George Bernard Shaw to write *The Doctor's Dilemma* in 1906.

Lane became a zealot for his cause, undeterred by questionable therapeutic outcomes —not to mention a 24 percent mortality rate in his thousands of operated cases. He was made a baronet in 1913 and, as Sir Arbuthnot, became one of the wealthiest surgeons in the world. Ironically, this was the same year in which the skeptics were beginning to provide strong evidence against the notions on which his operation was founded. During the next two decades the theory was battered on all sides—by radiologic, biochemical, clinical, and microscopic studies—and finally debunked. There has never been any sustainable evidence that absorption of toxic products from the lower bowel causes a single one of the symptoms or diseases that have so long been attributed to it. The headache, lassitude, and general sense of ill-being that do in fact occur in obstinate constipation have been shown to be the result of mechanical distension and irritation of the rectum by impacted masses of stool. There is no such thing as autointoxication.

But to call it a passing fad would not be entirely correct. The notion of autointoxication was based on an inextinguishable myth, namely the existence of the god Regularity. Though science disproved his existence, few of the faithful stopped believing. Whether overtly or in secret, the convinced still worship. Would that they might harken to the words of one of Arbuthnot Lane's leading opponents, Sir Arthur Hurst, who in 1935 wrote what he thought would be an epitaph for feces fixation:

> The vast army of hypochondriacs, who are never happy unless their stools conform to an ideal which they have invented for themselves, can only be cured by making themselves realize that faeces have no standard size, shape, consistence nor color; they are then ready to follow the example of the dog rather than that of the cat—and never look behind them.

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JOURNAL

Judea, 1975–76

EGON H. E. LASS

During the mid-seventies I was the field archaeologist at Tulul Abu Al Alayik, a site north of Jericho in the Judean Desert, in southern Israel. We were excavating several palaces of the Hasmonaean and Herodian periods, from the first and second centuries B.C. The director of the dig was Ehud Netzer of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; the workers were Bedouin of the Ka'abina, Gahalin, Rashaideh, Abeid, and Zullam tribes. I lived in the camp of a Zullam named Ali Abu Feiz, returning to Jerusalem once a week for Shabbat.

April 18, 1975. Today the Bedouin did not work very well, which is a rare occurrence. Usually they are the best workers anyone could ask for, but today they quit too early for the break and went back to work too late.

"When the cat's away, the mice will play," I said in Arabic.

Muhammad Muhammad thought that this was the cleverest thing I had ever said, but Ali didn't get it at first. An hour later he suddenly jumped out of his hole and came over to me.

"I think I know what you meant. Abu Joseph"—the director of the excavation, Ehud Netzer—"is the cat and we are the mice. Is it not so?"

I hit him with another Western expression: "If the shoe fits, wear it."

He was disgusted with me.

"Shoe? What shoe? Do you wish to speak with me? I am Badawi! The Badu do not speak around a corner, they speak straight when they mean to say something."

April 23, 1975. Every time Ali Abu Feiz and I greet each other he says, "Keef Haluck?" or "Keef il Hal?" which means "How are you?" But lately he has begun to say, "Keef Halu Aleik?" which could mean the same thing to one who doesn't know Arabic and isn't paying attention. What it means is, "How did they take pleasure upon you?" This implies that perhaps you are a homosexual. If you answer "Thanks be to Allah," you leave yourself open to ridicule. Whenever Ali asks me how they took pleasure upon me, I answer, "Zeyl Firan min il Biss" (As the mice took pleasure upon the cat).

"No, no, no!" all of them invariably cry. "You must say 'Zey mah Halu Aleik' (As they took pleasure upon you)!"

They become very upset if I do not keep to this ritual, which must be strictly observed even if someone is pulling your leg.

December 19, 1975. Two men from the Israeli government showed up this morning. They came to investigate the man who had plowed to the north of us. I gave them the license number of the tractor, which Ali had taken yesterday when he came to continue plowing. They went to talk to Ali in the shelter. When they had gone, Ali began to curse them.

"This man told me that I should not have built without permission. What is this wall? If you lean on it, it will fall down. But I have known this man for a long time, four years. He is but a little *ars* (pimp)."

"Wallah, ya-Egon," said Hafil of the Ka'abina. "He comes from Egypt. I did not know him until today, but when he speaks Arabic, it is the speech of an Egyptian, and such a one is very bad for all Arabs. He is angry from the life he had when he was in Egypt.

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They did not treat the Jews well there, and now he seeks revenge."

"But do not worry, ya-Egon," said Ali. "He is not to be feared. He shouts and he forbids all things, but one should pity him. When he forbids to build, one builds. When he forbids to graze, one grazes. And when he forbids to plow, one plows. But this time we must help him for Abu Joseph, so the plower does not ruin our excavation."

December 30, 1975. "Why is it," said Musa Auda, "that we in the East do not learn as much as those in the West?"

"Because, ya-Achi, our people are tired," said Ali. "Everyone has his day. Those in the West are having their day now. The Arabs have also had their day."

"They have taken our knowledge away from us," said Musa Auda.

"How?"

"Have you not heard of the great river Euphrat, which lies in the east?"

"Yes."

"When our people were great, they lived close to this river, and they carried with them a book in which all things of knowledge were written. It was written there how to work iron and copper and silver and gold. In this book was written how to build airplanes and cars and machines of every kind. And also it was written, Wallah, how to make the great bombs. Wallahi, this book contained the knowledge of the world. But the Westerners came and made war with us, and they took the book with them, and this is how the Arabs fell, so that now we are no more than beggars."

Ali didn't know exactly whether to believe him or not, and I remained silent.

The rain came and went, and we worked until dusk. Finally the rain became strong and we headed toward the shelter, where Ali made a large fire so that we were able to dry ourselves. While we ate, Ali demanded from me the story of Jesus: how he healed people, how he preached, how he was killed, how he rose from the dead.

"Wallahi, Issa was a prophet," said Ali. "Wallahi, Issa was one of us."

"He was a Jew," I said. "A very good Jew."

"And are we Badu not Jews also? Who is our father? Is not our father Ibrahim? And we are all his children, and therefore Issa is one of us. Wallahi, in the Qur'an it is written that he was a great prophet."

December 31, 1975. Ali broached the subject of Jesus again. Suleiman Salman disagreed on the point of Jesus being a Jew.

"He was a Christian, ya-Zalami. Was he not a Christian prophet?"

"Egon, ya-Egon! Did you not say that Issa was a Jew?"

"He was a Jew, and the first Christian. There were no Christians before him. He made the Christian religion."

Suleiman Salman was silent.

"And his parents?" said Ali. "Did he have a father and a mother?"

"His mother was Miriam, but it is written in our book that he was conceived by Allah."

"This is the truth, Wallahi. So we have been taught."

"Miriam had a husband—his name was Joseph."

"But she remained a virgin all her life," said Suleiman Salman.

"No, Issa had four brothers."

"What?!"

"It is so written in our book."

"This is a book for donkeys! This is a book of lies!"

"If this is a book of lies," I said carelessly, "then your Qur'an is also a book for donkeys."

There was a moan across the field, as though something inconceivably painful had happened, and then there was a shocked silence. After a moment, Muhammad Salman rebuked Suleiman Salman for saying such a thing about the Christian book, and said that my rebuttal was justified.

"Do you not understand," said Ali Abu Feiz, "that Egon has read many books, and that he is a Fahman, one who understands?"

"This is one who understands? This one, who says that Issa had brothers? This is a fool and a donkey!"

"Listen, ya-Suleiman," said Ali. "The Christian book is of Issa, and Issa is not ours. Issa is for the Christians, so let them believe as they will."

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Suleiman Salman did not leave off, however. All day I could hear him talking contemptuously to one or another of the Bedouin. And I thought to myself that I ought to get acquainted a bit more with the Qur'an, but it would be very difficult for me to undertake such a study now.

February 5, 1976. "We would really like to have our own government," says Ali. "We would like to come and go as we please. Now we are like prisoners, with our hands in irons. Every time I wish to go anywhere, here are the Jewish guards, putting their hands all over me, putting their hands on my *zubber* [private parts] to see if I carry a bomb. Wallahi, whenever something happens, we who live here have to eat *zift* [waste from an olive press]. I saw with my own eyes a car full of terrorists, who passed the Jewish guards on the road. The terrorists spoke Hebrew with them and laughed with the guards, and came to Jericho and pulled out their guns and killed a jeep full of Jewish soldiers, and went quickly across to Jordan. Wallahi, did we eat *zift* here or no?

"And then they threw us all into an empty pool. With your eyes into the sun! And you wait for three hours, until they question you. And even if they know that you had nothing to do with it, you are still guilty for them, and they make you eat *zift*, because should you not have stopped the terrorists? Did you not know that they were terrorists? Wallah, the whole world knew that they were terrorists, and so eat *zift* now, for you helped them by not stopping them. Now tell me, how shall I know that they are terrorists? And after I know, how shall I stop them? They have a machine gun, and I have my hands. Even if I stopped them with my hands, even if they did not kill me on the spot, how long do you think I would live after it? But there are those who would say that these problems are nothing. But I tell you, for us it is a great thing, and it bothers us like a sickness. Honor given wants honor returned, and this is not the way to treat human beings."

March 1, 1976. Three of the Rashaideh came and joined us by the fire. One of them walked on the sides of his feet, with the soles turned in, but his mobility was not impaired. They called him Salech the Disabled. He sat talking and gesturing with long slender hands, and Muhammad was completely absorbed in his stories until Ali would mutter to him, half impatiently, "Bring some more wood. Wash the glasses. Put some milk on the fire; we will drink it hot and sweet."

They were talking about a donkey that someone to the west of us had killed a few days back.

"It was an officer of the Jewish army," said Ali. "He told us that the area of the road was open for donkeys, but forbidden just below it. How shall a donkey know where it is forbidden to graze? And so they shot him, and why it is forbidden, I do not know. What shall we do against the army? But ya-Nas, our men are tired, Wallahi! There is not one among us whose *zubber* is not broken. Eh-Tyeb, if you shoot my donkey, shall I stand still and do nothing?"

March 15, 1976. I awoke to loud voices in Ali's shelter. I looked at my watch and saw that it was a quarter to six. Work does not start until six thirty.

I dressed quickly and walked to Ali's shelter. Half the crew were there already, and Ali Muhammad was yelling at Abu Sallami, who yelled back twice as loud.

Ali Muhammad's donkeys had entered Abu Sallami's tobacco field, and Abu Sallami had driven them away. Ali Muhammad believed Abu Sallami had deliberately driven them close to the Israeli army camp because he wanted them to get shot.

The argument was very bitter. I had never seen Ali Muhammad in such a state. He was snow white and shook all over, and for the first time in my life I understood that "foaming at the mouth" is not just an expression.

"Let's go!" said Ali Abu Feiz. "It is six o'clock. Go to work."

He was trying to separate them, and though it was still half an hour early, they all jumped up and took their wheelbarrows, which were standing just outside.

But Ali Muhammad would not stop talking.

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He made several grievous insults, and Abu Sallami turned with a hoe in his hand, yelling, "Ali!" in a threatening way. I saw Ali Muhammad reach out and take his pick, and I was at him, tearing the pick out of his hand, grabbing him by the lapels and shaking him violently.

"What is your meaning?" I shouted into his face. "What is your meaning? What is your meaning?"

For a moment he looked at me with an expression that I cannot describe, as if he were trying to placate me, to tell me that nothing bad would come between us. But then everything exploded around us in a pitched battle. Ali Muhammad turned to look, and then tore at my hands, shouting, "They are hitting my brother!" He raced up the incline to the north, picked up an enormous stone, and threw it; and then another, and another, and I saw one making contact with the neck of Mahmud, Abu Sallami's son. Mahmud tore himself loose from the hands that held him, and grabbed a large stone and lobbed it high and far, and it hit Ali Muhammad on the shoulder.

At the same time I saw several flying picks and hoes, and never saw where they came from or where they went. There was a lot of running and shouting, and suddenly it was over. Everyone came walking toward Ali's shelter and made ready to sit down again for another shouting match.

"Yallah, go home!" I yelled. "Wallah, *I* will go home!"

I went toward my tent and lay down, panting and shaking.

Later that day, I saw a man coming down the mountain, riding a donkey, and another man walking behind him. They were coming along the road to the north of us, and we sent Ahmed Abu Salech to go to them and ask the news. He returned and gave us the following story: Ali Muhammad and his brother had gone to one of Abu Sallami's relatives to complain, but had gotten into a fight again. Abu Sallami, not to be outdone, had gone to their father, who still knew nothing of what had happened, and had hit him over the head with a stone. It was this innocent and wounded man, Ali Muhammad's father, who was riding toward Jericho with blood all over him, in order to get the police.

"They wanted to make a noise," said Ali Abu Feiz. "Now they will have their noise. The police will take all of them and they will sleep in prison tonight."

We found later that the police did nothing of the kind. Like everyone else, they probably preferred to stay out of trouble among the Bedouin and not risk retribution.

March 22, 1976. Salech Rashid, the brother of Suleiman and Qamli's cousin, had been at a party last night. He had gone off to another room by himself and had come upon a girl whom he had secretly wanted for a long time. He came up behind her and put his arms around her, but the girl did not want this and began to struggle. At this moment the door opened and her brother came in. When he saw what was happening, he immediately pulled his dagger and twice plunged it into Salech Rashid. He left Salech lying on the floor, went straight to the police, and told them that he had killed to preserve his family's honor.

Salech Rashid crawled all the way home and died this morning. As a result, Suleiman Rashid, Hamid, and Muhammad Salman were absent from work today. It is incumbent upon the family to demand a life for a life, and there is very serious trouble now among the Ka'abina.

March 23, 1976. When Ali returned from Jericho, Muhammad took the donkey and went to Aqabat Jabr, leaving Ali and me to sit quietly by the fire. We spoke of the current troubles around us.

"There was no better person than Salech Rashid," said Ali. "But he was wrong, and he died for it. He has left his family with a great problem, and he left behind him a wife and four children. The killer gave himself up right away. He killed a trespasser in his own house, and he will go to prison for three or four years, that is all. If the Ka'abina kill him or one of his family, the one who kills will go to prison for life."

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"All right, if I were Badawi and someone came into my home and bothered my sister, what would I do?"

"You would kill him straight away."

"So that the one who killed did the only thing that he could do?"

"Yes. There was no other way for him."

"Well, then, let it rest."

"No. The one who killed had no other way, and now the family of Suleiman Rashid has no other way either. They must kill, demanding life for life. Wallahi, perhaps two or three will yet die before it is done. This is the law of the Badu, and this is the law of the Qur'an. Salech Rashid was meant to die at that very hour, and there is no bargaining with death. Wallahi, when death comes, there is no eating of bread. A man grows like the green grass, and dies in the heat of the summer, and falls back into the ground. How can you bargain with this?"

March 29, 1976. "In the end of days," said Ahmed Abu Salech, "there will be a war over Jerusalem, and all the modern weapons will stop working. The tanks will not go, the guns will not shoot, if you pull a trigger nothing will happen, because the last war will be fought with sword upon sword, and blood will fill the wadis."

Summer 1977. I asked Ali about the news of the tribes. He told me that the man who had killed Salech Rashid had been released recently, and as soon as Suleiman Rashid had gotten wind of that fact, he had started moving in a straight line with the intent to kill. One of the Ka'abina met him on the way, apparently, and asked him what he was doing. When the Ka'abina found out, he grabbed Suleiman Rashid and cried for help. So they sat on Suleiman and got the police. Suleiman was now in prison for the protection of the man who had killed his brother. They were giving him a chance to get as far away from here as he could, to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, India, to parts entirely unknown, because it would be suicidal for him to remain in Israel. As soon as Suleiman Rashid was set free, he would begin to make inquiries, and if he ever found out the whereabouts of his brother's killer, he would simply begin moving in a straight line again.

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· B O O K S ·

REREADING

The Palace of the Snow Queen

BARBARA SJOHOLM

Three A.M., bolt awake. It's late November above the Arctic Circle. The body insists it's time to get up, even though it won't be light until—when?—nine-thirty, and only a pale blue light then. I crossed nine time zones to arrive in Stockholm, traveled seventeen hours north by train to Kiruna. I've come to spend the winter in Arctic Scandinavia, first stop the old Sami village of Jukkasjärvi by the frozen Torne River, where every year a team of builders, artists, and amateurs comes together to reshape what melted in the spring: a hotel made of mounded snow and blocks and columns of blue river ice.

My cabin is warm. Outside, snow falls. Most of the possessions I'll have with me for the next three months—laptop, journal, long underwear, woolens, calcium pills with extra vitamin D—lie strewn about. I'm never tidy when I travel; I need to take over my temporary spaces completely. I make a cup of coffee, take out a folder of copied pages and a library book.

I'm going to reread "The Snow Queen" the way I always dreamed I'd read it, not in the twee Danish town of Odense, which has made an industry of Hans Christian Andersen, but up here in the North, in the wintery land of reindeer. As a child in Southern California, I dreamed of snowy landscapes but never saw a single flake. Every December my friends and I heard familiar songs: "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," "Frosty the Snowman," and "Jingle Bells." As the sun beat down, some of our neighbors turned their yards into Santa's Workshop or sprayed white stuff on their trees. Illustrated books showed cottages half buried in white, snowmen out front, with children in caps and jackets throwing snowballs. We knew the forts and figures were made of snow, but what *was* snow? Was it very cold, like ice cream, or was it more like the spangled white felt that surrounded the base of the Christmas tree in our living room? The only snowflakes we knew were the ones we cut, painstakingly, from folded white paper in school. Was snow frozen rain? No, it must be soft, we thought, a silent satin coverlet.

What about ice? Ice cubes we knew, snow cones and Popsicles. But up in Alaska and the North Pole there were houses of ice—the igloos of the Eskimos, the palace of the Snow Queen. That far north, Christmas wasn't just white, it was perpetual. I'd never even owned a coat. What would the cold feel like? Sleeping in an igloo must be like climbing into the freezer at the ice cream shop and having the lid close over you.

I pull out one of the copied versions of "The Snow Queen," taken from *The Pink Fairy Book. The Pink Fairy Book,* along with the *Green, Lilac, Yellow,* and so on, was edited by Andrew Lang and first published in the late nineteenth century. I read the library editions as a child. We had few books in our

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house beyond the Bible and the complete works of Mary Baker Eddy. Nevertheless, we were avid library-goers, my mother and I, and when I wasn't reading Christian Science *Sentinel* stories for children, I was reading fairy tales. The Lang books were my passport to Grimm, Perrault, and Andersen; I checked them out over and over. I believe my mother thought they were as innocent and uplifting as the tales about children praying, not precisely to be healed, but to keep their thinking clear and right.

It's utterly silent outside, and utterly black except for the pool of light outside my window, which illuminates a deep drift of snow and snowflakes—"white bees," Andersen calls them—buzzing by. I slip into the story of Kai and Gerda, a tale of friendship frozen into ice and redeemed by faithful love, as if placing on an old turntable an LP I've heard a thousand times. The pictures are as I remember them, bold but languid, vaguely Pre-Raphaelite. The women wear swirling cloaks and clingy, high-waisted skirts that show the outlines of their strong, elongated thighs. "The Snow Queen Appears to Kai" seems to bear more than a passing resemblance to Botticelli's *Venus*.

I read about the troll who invents a mirror "which had the strange power of being able to make anything good or beautiful that it reflected appear horrid; and all that was evil and worthless seem attractive and worthwhile." When the troll takes the mirror up to heaven to make fun of God and the angels, he loses his grip on it, and it falls and breaks into billions of pieces, some of which are turned into windowpanes or spectacles, and many of which become tiny glass splinters that get into people's eyes and make them see things askew and cruelly. I read about the splinters that lodge in Kai's eye and his heart; about his semiwilling abduction by the Snow Queen; about his friend Gerda's long journey to find him and love him back to himself. I read slowly, but it's over too soon.

It was twelve years ago that I first reread "The Snow Queen," in the Haugaard translation. The story had been important to me as a child, and I went back to Andersen's tale as I began to pull together fragments of memories and past influences for a memoir about my Christian Science childhood. At the time I was struggling to make sense of a religion that had instilled such trust in God's love—and in the certainty that all was for the best in this best of all possible worlds—that it had left me completely unprepared for a string of family disasters. The memoir tells the story of my mother's crisis of faith when she discovered she had breast cancer; of her breakdown and the suicide attempt that left her disfigured; of her suffering and death and my losses as a child. The metaphor of the splintered mirror offered a means of exploring how people who said they loved you—your parents, for example—could change into unrecognizable beings who would abandon you for the icy necessity of death or for another woman (my father's second wife, a classic wicked stepmother). It was with Kai that I identified on that reading. I felt as if I, too, had long had an icy splinter inside me, a splinter that had gradually frozen my heart.

But now, reading "The Snow Queen" in Lapland, I see how much of the tale is taken up by Gerda's great adventure, out into, as Andersen calls it several times, "the wide world." When she loses her dearest childhood friend—first psychologically, through the splinters that turn him sour and cynical, and then, in reality, to the powerful and seductive Snow Queen—Gerda sets off on an epic journey to find him. Never wavering in her belief that he is alive, she sails, walks, rides in a carriage, and is carried by a reindeer to the Snow Queen's palace, where Kai has been doing little but racking his brain over broken pieces of ice, trying to spell a forgotten word.

Yesterday I crunched and squeaked my way through the halls and suites of the Ice Hotel, taking photographs and talking with an architect who told me he'd modeled his design of the vaultlike corridors on Antonio Gaudí's strange cathedral masterpiece, La Sagrada Familia. The mounds of snow, bulldozed onto steel forms, had become disorienting tunnels with white floors, ceilings, and walls. Opaque and soft-looking, the snow nevertheless was hard to the touch, the crystals

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packed into weight-bearing walls. All sound was muffled; it was impossible to hear voices in the next room because snow acts as a sound barrier. I had the impression both of being buried alive and of being in a sacred space, a Cistercian monastery or a Greek Orthodox chapel. The white solidity of the snow was balanced by the transparency of the pillars and blocks of ice. During the day the ice was a radiant blue, the light broken and refracted hundreds of times by joints and crackings. Light is captured and magnified by ice; even under the workers' artificial floodlights, the ice took on unearthly sheens and glitters.

Well-wrapped in my insulated clothes and red hat and mittens, I stomped my feet and breathed clouds of mist in suites where chain saws roared and chisels chinked, where artists attacked massive blocks of ice, creating everything from tables and chairs to beds to statues and friezes. Some of the designs were free-spirited (the Rock 'n' Roll Room with its homage to the Fender guitar) or kitschy (the Viking Room, with its bed in the shape of a dragon-headed ship—"Especially popular with Americans," I was told). Other suites were designed by minimalists, with bulging snow beds and undulant columns of ice. In an ecstasy of cold, I wandered around for hours before dipping back into the warmth of my cabin to write up notes.

"It's really not so cold to sleep in the Ice Hotel," everyone told me. "Snow is an insulator. It only gets down to five in here, even though it might be twenty or thirty outside." No one ever says "minus" here during the winter; it's just assumed. I'm planning to come back in a couple of months, when the hotel is finished, to take a room overnight. Somehow I'm not convinced that sleeping on a bed of ice, even on a layer of reindeer skins, even inside a thermal sleeping bag, will be especially cozy. (Fast forward: It's not. Though it is strange and beautiful.)

In my memory, the Snow Queen's palace absorbed most of the narrative. Its descriptions acted on me like an icy aphrodisiac:

> The castle walls were of the driven snow, and the windows and doors of the biting winds. There were more than a hundred halls, according to the way the snow drifted; the biggest stretched for many miles, all lit up by the intense Northern Lights; and they were so big, so bare, so icy cold, and so sparkling.

I am surprised now to find that so little of the fairy tale takes place in the palace. In fact, there are almost as many descriptions of sunshine and flowers as of snow. Did I forget them because these things were so normal to a California child? Andersen, who often traveled to Italy and claimed he felt more himself in warm and sensuous climes, lavishes description on the little window boxes between Gerda and Kai's attic apartments, and on the cherry orchard and garden of the wise old woman who takes Gerda in. The book ends with a vision of a garden, too—Eden restored after the cold trials of the North.

Andersen's descriptions of ice owe much to his imagination. Now that I'm actually up above the Arctic Circle with my maps and guidebooks, I'm aware of just how vague Andersen's geography and meteorology are. He puts Lapland near the North Pole, and makes the snow and ice perpetual. In reality, Lapland is far enough south to experience all four seasons; it's not Italy, but some summer days can be positively balmy. Even the Ice Hotel melts in late April.

I make a second cup of coffee and take out a copy of another translation, this one by Erik Christian Haugaard, a bilingual Danish author who put together *Hans Christian Andersen: The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories* twenty-seven years ago. This is the version I read when I was working on my memoir. I'm shocked at how lively the writing is; at how much *more* story there is than in *The Pink Fairy Book* tale, which is, I now notice for the first time, "Translated from the German of Hans Andersen by Miss Alma Alleyne." I compare the two. Miss Alma Alleyne's condensed and bowdlerized translation has left out whole sections, such as Gerda's encounters with the flowers in the wise old woman's garden, each of whom tells a different story. Again I read slowly; again I think, "This is really about Gerda, out in the wide world, discovering herself."

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It's still only 6:00 A.M. I rummage through my things, find a Luna Bar and an apple, and eat them. Now I open a collection of Andersen's tales in Danish that I picked up yesterday at the Kiruna library. (During my three months of travel in Scandinavia, I'll often be allowed to check out books overnight by trusting librarians). I've never read Andersen before in his original language, but Danish isn't difficult if you know Norwegian. People often assume that because I translate Norwegian, I must be Norwegian myself. In fact, I had a grandmother who emigrated from Sweden as a child with her family, as well as a grandfather who came from the southwest of Ireland, arriving alone in Boston at fourteen. My Stockholm-born grandmother died in childbirth; my three-year-old father was adopted by the Wilson family. Later, when he found his grandparents again, he discovered they spoke Swedish, or English with heavy accents. Their language died with them. My father never thought to learn it, preferring Latin instead.

I know Norwegian because of a few summer jobs and then because its literature began to interest me enormously. In days gone by, when there was more time, educated people often learned a language, or several, in order to read important authors. I suppose that's how I've felt about Norwegian. Relatively few literary works in Norwegian have crossed into English; when I read fiction and poetry in the original, new worlds opened up. I also found how rich the experience of reading another language could be when I succumbed to a different rhythm and tasted the flavors and shapes of unfamiliar words.

I turn to *Snedronningen,* Danish for "The Snow Queen," where Andersen's quirky, confident voice immediately rings out: *Se så. Nu begynder vi.* ("Well, now. Let's begin," is how I would translate it.) Andersen was famously underserved by English translators in the past (and even more recently—the opening of the Haugaard version is decidedly clunky: "All right. We will start the story"). Yet there's a colloquial dash that comes across even in Miss Alma Alleyne's translation, a sense of real speech, racy and humorous. With pleasure, I now read the original Danish through to the end, noting the places where the original text can't be rendered in English with the same meaning. For instance, Gerda calls Kai her *"lille legebroder,"* her little play-brother, which is always translated as "playmate," a tarnished English word if ever there was one.

What catches my attention on this rereading, now that I'm up in the North? Shoes and socks! What does it mean that Gerda is so often shoeless in the story? Her first act, on setting off to find Kai, is to offer her red shoes to the river. Later on she's given boots by a princess, but these are forgotten in haste. By the time she approaches the icy door of the snow palace, she's barefoot again and has to pick her way across a frozen expanse toward Kai.

Andersen was a cobbler's son, and shoes played a recurring role in his work. Another memorable Andersen tale is "The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf," a creepy story in which a selfish girl who doesn't want to get her new shoes wet puts a loaf of bread down on a puddle, and promptly sinks into a boggy purgatory in which all the flies whose wings she's torn off for sport crawl over her face. In "The Red Shoes," a poor orphan named Karen is taken in by a near-sighted old lady who, when she buys the child a pair of shoes, can't tell that they're red, not black. There's a scandal when Karen wears them to church, and the red shoes take on a life of their own, dancing away with Karen until she becomes so worn and thin that she asks an executioner to chop off her feet with his axe. (As a child growing up to believe that illness, pain, and selfish behavior were just "errors" that could be rectified by a half hour with *Science and Health,* I was shocked and thrilled at the bizarre punishments Andersen meted out to his heroines.) Gerda often has *no* shoes, and that suggests that her journey is a religious pilgrimage, with echoes of barefoot martyrdom endured for love, as well as an act of great courage and fortitude.

Reading "The Snow Queen" as Gerda's story makes me more aware of its wide array of women characters, including animals and talking flowers. Not just one, but *four* wise old women play roles in the tale. One is the Grandmother at home (Kai and Gerda are

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said to have parents, but we never meet them, and it's never clear whose grandmother she is). Second is the old gardener who snags Gerda off the river with her shepherd's crook and uses mild magic to keep her in the cherry orchard long past summer. Later in the story, we meet first a Lapp woman, who writes a note to her friend the Finn woman on a piece of dried cod, and then the Finn woman herself, who seems to live in her sauna and who boils the cod letter in a stew pot after reading it. All these women are good witches, mild fertility figures dispensing wisdom and directions.

The Snow Queen herself is a goddess archetype of a different mold, beyond good and evil, a seductive vamp, even a polar vampire, who invites Kai to creep inside her bearskin coat:

> "Are you still cold?" she asked, and kissed his forehead. Her kiss was colder than ice. It went right to his heart, which was already half made of ice. He felt as though he were about to die, but it hurt only for a minute, then it was over.

She refrains from more kissing only because she knows she'd kiss the life out of him. Seductresses are common in nineteenth-century fiction; more intriguing to me, I find on this rereading, is the little robber girl, who participates in the casual killing of the coachman and servants accompanying Gerda, and then claims Gerda for herself. "She must give me her muff, her beautiful dress and sleep with me in my bed," she announces. A modern reader might well find an erotic subtext in their night together, especially after reading Jackie Wullschlager's recent biography, which finds ample evidence that Andersen, if not an open homosexual, definitely had queer predilections. Butch or not, the little robber girl is a bold and brilliant creation, as refreshingly unfeminine and amoral as Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking (Lindgren also wrote a novel about a robber family, *Rona, the Robber's Daughter*).

Yet of all the story's characters, it's Gerda who impresses me most now. (As a child I liked the talking reindeer best; a dozen years ago it was Kai who called to me; in twenty

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years, perhaps I'll be most drawn to the Finn woman in her sauna.) Gerda is steadfast, she's warmhearted, she listens to animals and takes their advice, she's shaken but unbowed by setbacks. Even though her feet are freezing, she enters the palace of the Snow Queen, walks over to Kai, and sets him straight. She has no pride; her tears fall on his breast and melt the splinters in his heart. Then *he* cries, and the splinter washes right out of his eye. And isn't that what we all want deep down? To drop the cynicism and defensiveness, to give up the mathematics of hatred, to melt the hardness of another's heart and in the process melt our own walls too?

Not all of Andersen's tales appeal to me anymore, and many make me shudder. I believe Gerda is the reason I can still reread "The Snow Queen" without gagging on the saccharine Christian symbolism that spoils some of his other works. Though there's a bit of the sentimental in the ending of the story when Gerda and Kai return by foot (Gerda presumably still without shoes) to the garden of their childhood, the effect is deeply satisfying. If our hearts are open, we *can* return to the Edens of our youth, even if we are, like Gerda and Kai, now fully grown.

Seven-thirty and still pitch dark, but now breakfast is available in the inn across the street from the ice hotel. I'm starving. I put on long underwear, Icelandic sweater, and heavy parka. It's been in the twenties here (that's *minus* twenties), but somehow that doesn't bother me. It's a historic accident that I was born in Long Beach, California. I loved to swim in the Pacific and to lie under the apricot tree reading fairy tales; all the same, I was just too hot too often growing up. Now I'm going to get to know the cold, as I've always dreamed of doing. I'm still thinking about Gerda's journey, still hearing the Danish in my mind. *Den vide verden.* The wide world.

I open the door of my cabin and a blast of winter snow rushes in. But, unlike Gerda, I'm dressed for my journey.

I have my shoes on. And two pairs of thick socks.

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FOR THE FIRST TIME, PERHAPS, A TENABLE HISTORY OF JESUS

It won't be found in the Bible. Critical examination of the New Testament Gospels reveals sloppy history, perhaps deliberately deceptive, giving a picture of Jesus more imaginative than factual. Frankly, most Christians seem not to notice or care—transcendentalism spins its own reality. But true realists, for whom accurate history matters, may be pleased with what the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas* provides: 113 notes taken down by Thomas of perplexing things Jesus said. Such notes were probably made at the time they were heard and have not suffered alteration—the best kind of source for a history.

Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark.* Hannah provides all the text of *Thomas* with comments and Marcan context, thereby developing a narrative of Jesus that is tenably historical.

This ***historical*** Jesus based his teaching on the Epicurean philosophy; e.g. in place of Judaism's practices of fasting, praying, almsgiving, and obeying food laws, this ***historical*** Jesus substituted: "Tell no lie and never do what you hate." This ***historical*** Jesus never mentioned a devil, demons, or hell. Epicureanism also shaped Jesus' opinion that God and Caesar are man-made authorities and that one's ultimate authority should be oneself.

Hannah's book is 321 pgs., pbk., $12 postpaid.
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"I Am What Is"

JOHN RAY

THE MIND OF EGYPT:
HISTORY AND MEANING IN THE TIME OF THE PHARAOHS
By Jan Assmann; translated from the German by Andrew Jenkins.
Metropolitan Books. $35.

Ancient Egypt lasted a long time. There is no accepted definition of what history is, or of when it began, but one way of approaching the question is to look for the emergence of writing. This is a somewhat unfashionable criterion, and it offends the poor prehistorians, who have to carry on their profession without written records, but it has the merit of simplicity. Writing emerged in the Near East toward the end of the fourth millennium B.C., which means that there have been more than fifty centuries of written history since that event. For thirty-five of these centuries, there was a Pharaoh on the throne of Egypt (if one includes the Roman emperors, who admittedly were largely indifferent to the place). This is the equivalent of seven-tenths of the span of recorded time. Cleopatra and Julius Caesar went on a tour of the country in 47 B.C., and no doubt they visited the pyramids of Giza. For Cleopatra, these monuments would have been the work of her ancestors, and, like us, she might even have referred to their builders as the Ancient Egyptians. She is, after all, closer in time to us than she is to the Great Pyramid, and the tongue that she took the trouble to learn—Ancient Egyptian—has the longest attested history of any language on this planet. Egypt's sister civilization in the Land of the Two Rivers has a restless, shifting identity: it has been called Sumer, Babylonia, Assyria, Chaldea, and Mesopotamia. Now it is Iraq, and there is a possibility that it too could dissolve once its despotic regime falls. Egypt, on the other hand, is simply Egypt.

It is as difficult to characterize a long-lived civilization as it is to define history, but the state that emerged along the Nile—the first unified state known to us—has some things in common with the culture of prerevolutionary France. It was governed by a sun king, whose centralized court acted as a focus for culture and a restraint on the tendency of the provinces to fall away from the center. It was fairly easily defended, and the main weakness lay on the northeast frontier, which needed guarding. Much of the flourish that characterizes Egyptian historical writing can be seen as the hieroglyphic equivalent of *la gloire*; in a similar vein, some of the bombast was designed to cover up a tendency to collapse militarily at the arrival of a determined enemy. For much of its history it attracted skilled immigrants, who proceeded to declare themselves more native than the natives. Egyptian culture was distinct from that of its Near Eastern neighbors, and it is more than likely that the features that made it unique—animal-headed gods, the elaborate care of the dead, and the elegance of its visual arts—were fostered by the ruling classes in an attempt to hold together a society that had attracted such human diversity into its midst.

Ancient Egypt was multi-ethnic, and for parts of its history it may have been multilingual, but it never had any intention of being multicultural. An Egyptian, according to an

John Ray is Herbert Thompson Reader in Egyptology at the University of Cambridge. His *Reflections of Osiris: Lives from Ancient Egypt* will be published in the United States this fall by Oxford University Press.

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oracle quoted by Herodotus, was someone who drank from the waters of the Nile, and it did not matter where such a person originally came from. What did matter, as Herodotus's account of the country makes clear, was the degree to which the person conformed to the ideals and norms of being an Egyptian. The story of Joseph is an excellent example: it is the tale of an immigrant who became more Egyptian than the Egyptians and managed to match the wisest of nations in wisdom. The climax of his career came when the Pháraoh gave him an Egyptian name (Genesis 41:45). The meaning of this name has been disputed by Egyptologists and rabbis ever since, but that is beside the point. A name is nationality. Joseph had become an embodiment of the ideal; he was now an Egyptian.

The idea of embodiment permeated Egyptian thought. It was present in the person of the Pharaoh, who was an earthly incarnation of the Sun God, and in certain sacred animals, such as the Apis Bull. It is also detectable in Egyptian art, which lays emphasis on eternal types and idealistic representations rather than fleeting incidentals like perspective or light and shade. A figure of the tomb owner on a wall is not a portrait in the modern sense, although it may well sport features that could make it more recognizable to those who knew him. Instead, it is a representation of those qualities and ideals that the deceased, or the artist he commissioned, wished to be associated with himself. Such a figure can be seen as a hieroglyph writ large; there is a symbiotic relationship between writing and painting in ancient Egypt that is very marked, and of which the Egyptians were well aware. This art has more than a little in common with Eastern Orthodox techniques of icon painting, and there may be a link between the two, perhaps involving the city of Alexandria. Whatever the truth, this approach to representation is typical of Egyptian culture: visual art is treated almost as a window through which eternal and greater realities can be glimpsed behind the superficial and contingent phenomena of the tangible world.

A word that summarizes this attitude to reality is *Platonic*. Plato, after all, postulated a world of perfect forms lying behind the imperfect copies that were all that was available in the physical universe. The extent of Plato's debt to Egypt is much discussed, and it may be unknowable, but there is no doubt that later forms of Platonism flourished on Egyptian soil. There was something in Neoplatonism that the Egyptians found irresistible. Similarly, it may not be a coincidence that the Egyptian Church gravitated toward Monophysitism, the notion that Christ has but one nature rather than an amalgam of two; that he was wholly divine rather than part human and part divine. Christ does not come down to earth. Instead, man looks to heaven. The events of daily life are surface phenomena: the reality lies beyond, and deeper behind, all the chance incidentals that make up daily existence.

Egypt, as we have remarked, has had an exceptionally long history, but what did the Egyptians think this history comprised, and what lessons did they draw from it? This is the theme explored in Jan Assmann's remarkable book *The Mind of Egypt*. We have a basic understanding of how the Egyptians classified time, and we have their king-lists and dynastic arrangements, which are essentially those used by modern Egyptologists. We have autobiographies, though mostly of a sketchy kind and designed for funerary contexts, and we have the edicts and self-justifying pronouncements of kings and other powerful interest groups. Material of this sort figures in all the conventional books whose titles tend to be a variant on Yet Another History of Ancient Egypt Livened Up With the Usual Pictures. Assmann is attempting something far more ambitious. He works through the entire span of Egypt's past, from its protohistory to the late classical period, and he uses material that is often considered purely literary and therefore separate from that used in documentary history. What he attempts to do is pen a psychological portrait of Egyptian culture. He asks questions that are normally avoided by ancient historians: What motivated the culture? How did it view the relationship between the individual and

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the universe surrounding him or her? What explanations did it provide for worldly events and reversals of fortune?

The result is impressive. Assmann's range is encyclopedic; there is material here that was quite unknown to this reviewer and possibly to other Egyptologists. Parallels are drawn with a range of different cultures, modern and medieval, as well as ancient. There are analyses of the Egyptians' understanding of time, and of the ways in which the Egyptian state could be conceptualized. There is also a learned and challenging view of the ways in which Egyptian culture came to be perceived in the West during the centuries before Champollion's deciphering of the hieroglyphs enabled that culture to speak for itself. The amount of thought that has gone into this book is immense and of a measure with the scale and scope of ancient Egypt itself. The resulting text is often tightly packed, and some paragraphs will yield the whole of their meaning only on a second or third reading. Few concessions are made to those with a challenged attention span. This is a deeply serious and theoretical book, one that requires an equal response from its readers, as they find themselves confronted with such constructions as "the Egyptian chronotope" and "the mythic brace" (the latter, one may be relieved to learn, turns out to be alien to the Pharaonic mind-set).

Egyptology suffers from the existence of a large and publicity-seeking lunatic fringe, and this has tended to produce a strong reaction among professional Egyptologists. The result, at least in the English-speaking world, is that the pragmatic tends to rule and the introspective is avoided. This is less true in German scholarship, where theoretical notions are more readily entertained. But even within German Egyptology, Jan Assmann's status as an exponent of ideas is unrivaled. This was clear in his previous publications, *Moses the Egyptian* and *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, and there is no doubt that *The Mind of Egypt* marks the culmination of years of questioning about the past and the ways it can be conceptualized. There is nothing of the lunatic fringe in Assmann; he is simply not afraid to cast a light into areas of ancient thinking that are often dismissed as unknowable or ungraspably subjective.

The Egyptians' view of their own history that emerges from this book is in line with the theme of embodiment that we have been considering. In the way that an individual king was the current incarnation of the Sun God—the divine and eternal essence of kingship—the individual Egyptian could be seen as the manifestation of unchanging qualities, almost as if he were a theatrical stage on which the script written by these principles could be played out. (There is only one play called *Hamlet*, but there have been many Hamlets in the history of the theater.) Chief among these principles was the quality known as *ma'at*, a word that has variously been translated as truth, harmony, justice, or ethical value system. This was the yardstick by which moral behavior could be evaluated and, literally, judged, since in the divine sentencing that awaited the dead, the individual heart, or conscience, would be weighed in the balance against a feather, the hieroglyph that represented the concept of *ma'at*. Immortality or extinction hung upon this event. In mythological terms *ma'at* was seen as a goddess wearing her emblem upon her head, and she was the daughter of the Sun God; in other words, she acquired her divinity from him, and she was his prime creation. Even kings were to be judged in her light, and the same was true of gods, within limits. Another principle was that of eternity, which acted both as the focal point of time and as the

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measure of its individual units. Within such broad schemes there is room for much personal variation, and this was encouraged. There is no doubt that ancient Egyptian culture was more creative than some authorities would have us believe.

The publicity accompanying this book touts its uniqueness. In a pedantic sense, this is untrue. Several books have tried to enter into the Egyptians' mind-set, and in the United States a start was made as early as 1912 in James Henry Breasted's *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*. It is not possible to write any connected account of an ancient civilization, or for that matter a modern one, without making assumptions about what that culture thought to be important and how it viewed itself. But these normally remain assumptions, lying in the background of the narrative or entirely unstated. Assmann takes such questions out of the background, or the frame of reference, and makes them the foreground of the investigation. In this way, the light of *ma'at* becomes the light of historical inquiry. The goddess who carries out the judgment becomes the subject of assessment, and it is this that makes *The Mind of Egypt* unique.

> I am what is. I am all that is, that was, that shall be; no mortal has ever lifted my veil. He alone is of himself, and to this One all things owe their being.

These words were ascribed in classical tradition (Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*) to ancient Egypt, and they were included by Schiller in his influential essay "On the Legation of Moses." They were copied out by Beethoven, who kept them framed in glass on his desk. Not even this detail has escaped Jan Assmann, which is as it should be, since he is close in some ways to being the Beethoven of Egyptology. *The Mind of Egypt* is a singular book that will provoke debate for a generation to come. It is essential reading for those who wish to call themselves Egyptologists, and it is an important intellectual contribution to the whole question of what constitutes history and historiography.

Evolution by Degrees

BODY HEAT:
TEMPERATURE AND LIFE ON EARTH
By Mark S. Blumberg.
Harvard University Press. $22.

Reviewed by CHRIS MOONEY

Probably the greatest virtue of *Body Heat*, Mark S. Blumberg's tour of the strategies living things have adopted to cope with temperature, lies in the many mini-Eureka moments the book will inevitably deliver to its readers. This reviewer was particularly struck by Blumberg's brief but resounding refutation of claims by the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan acolytes that through meditation they can rev up their internal body temperature and resist the chill from freezing wet towels draped across their backs. Herbert Benson, author of the 1975 best-seller *The Relaxation Response*, even traveled to Northern India to study these mysterious monks and to try to corroborate their powers. Now Blumberg tells us exactly what was fishy about the research: "Anyone—monk or not—can wrap himself in frigid sheets without becoming hypothermic because water is . . . a poor conductor of heat." *Duh*, one wants to say.

For Blumberg, a professor of psychology at the University of Iowa, the Tibetan monk example illustrates one of the many ways that our intuitions betray us when it comes to temperature. Take fevers, to which Blumberg devotes a chapter. Though we foolishly attack them with aspirin, ibuprofen, and acetaminophen, they're actually designed by evolution to help the body fight off microscopic invaders. Or take so-called fire walkers. They impress us because we don't realize that hot coals also conduct heat poorly, and can't burn you if you walk across them quickly enough. "I'm still waiting to see someone walk over a

Chris Mooney is a senior writer and online editor at *The American Prospect* magazine.

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bed of hot copper," Blumberg writes knowingly. He also dispenses with the notion that that peppers are "hot": in fact, they contain a compound known as capsaicin, which happens to prompt the same neural response in the body as does intense heat.

Such instances of diligent debunking suggest what Blumberg's book could—and perhaps should—have been about: "Everything we don't understand about temperature." Under this heading, the author does an impressive job of showing the evolved and often unacknowledged role of body heat in such activities as eating, sleeping, and sex. He also provides an array of useful explanations for things like goose bumps (each located at the site of a hair follicle, they're "an evolutionary holdover from a time when our fur coats were grown, not purchased").

But ultimately, Blumberg strives for much more and ends up with much less. Rich anecdotes are compressed into short paragraphs and get mired in the rest of *Body Heat*, which devolves at times into rather technical discussions of human physiochemistry. Another trouble is that as the book unfolds, its scope—"temperature and life on earth"—seems increasingly overbroad, reducing the author to stating the obvious: "Temperature is an integral part of our daily lives, our rituals, and our language." "Clearly, our very survival depends on adequate control of our internal thermal environment." (Clearly.) On occasion, Blumberg even finds himself battling with phantoms in an attempt to make an underwhelming observation seem somewhat less so. "Contrary to popular opinion," he writes, "humans do not pant." But it seems unlikely that those who might occasionally describe humans as "panting" mean the term in anything other than a metaphorical sense. In any case, this hardly constitutes an erroneous popular opinion.

Condescension to the reader has become an increasingly annoying tic of the popular science genre, and it's a hang-up that Blumberg largely avoids. What he can't escape, though, is the taxonomic difficulty that lies at the heart of a project like *Body Heat*. While many of the book's how-things-work examples are enlightening, the overarching theme is arguably not temperature at all, but rather the ingenuity of evolution, which has adapted living things to temperature fluctuations just as it has adapted them to electromagnetic radiation, to gravity, to air pressure, and so forth. Blumberg more or less acknowledges this himself, noting that the solutions to problems posed to animals by temperature "utilize some of the most elegant and creative mechanisms that the evolutionary process has devised." But he never quite answers the question "What makes temperature unique?"

Still, there's no doubt that thermal exigencies have prompted some fascinating adaptations in the animal world. For Blumberg, perhaps the canonical example of this is the hair of the polar bear. As a way of maximizing their absorption of heat from the sun, polar bears have dark skin. But having similarly dark hair would severely restrict their ability to camouflage themselves. Thus, courtesy of evolution by natural selection, polar bear hair provides an ingenious solution to both problems. Though it appears white from a distance, the hair is actually hollow, and each shaft "guides the light down to the darkly pigmented skin, where it is absorbed."

Body Heat runs us through numerous other examples of clever thermal adaptations: the instinctive movement of certain fish through select ocean "thermoclimes" whose temperatures are well suited to their bodies; the behavioral adaptations of Antarctic emperor penguins, whose egg-incubating males join together by the thousands in huddles where temperatures can reach 95 degrees; and, of course, the seasonal migrations of certain birds. Blumberg also spends plenty of time on humans, explaining, for example, why infants possess a surprising resilience to freezing temperatures and special tissues designed to produce heat. There are also explorations of whether languages have evolved so that phrases associated with warmth ("a warm embrace") are always positive, while those associated with cold ("a cold shoulder") are always negative—which does indeed seem to be the case—and whether humans grow more violent and prone to rage in hotter cli-

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mates. In the latter case, Blumberg cites evidence that pitchers bean more batters on hot days, while drivers in cars lacking air conditioning are more likely to honk their horns. (This, again, explains a lot.)

Throughout it all, Blumberg shows no apparent weaknesses as a scientist. However, as a science popularizer he has some shortcomings. Repeatedly, his prose is either too cute by half—"If planets were porridge, Goldilocks would have eaten neither," he writes of Pluto and Mercury—or overly technical. In his chapter on fevers, for example, Blumberg himself grows rather feverish about prostaglandins, leucocytes, and neutrophils.

The humanistic learning that pervaded the writings of a Carl Sagan or a Stephen Jay Gould is also less in evidence here. Sure, Blumberg duly cites what Hippocrates and Galen had to say about temperature, but he seems to stray out of his range when touching on certain topics. In an analogy that would crack up any law student, for instance, he writes that "the laws of physics form the foundation for all science. Just as U.S. state laws cannot violate U.S. federal laws, the laws of chemistry and biology cannot violate the laws of physics." If only it were so cut-and-dried.

Works in the popular science genre, which *Body Heat* clearly aspires to join, can be roughly divided into two breeds. On the one hand are those that simply provide lucid explanations of scientific phenomena to the lay public; the canonical example would be Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*. On the other hand are books that push still further to incorporate well-known scientific information into a new theoretical or metaphorical framework that can advance both humanistic and scientific understanding simultaneously. Here the best example would be Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene*. The trouble with *Body Heat* is that, though it sporadically delivers *Cosmos*-style nuggets of lucid explanation, it at least *appears* to aim for something more sweeping. Yet by the end of the book, as Blumberg simply inverts a John Updike quotation and concludes that "Earth, in fact, is an island of life that warmth has created," it's clear that all the heat has gone out of its universe.

Freedom, Bounded

THE IMPERFECT GARDEN: THE LEGACY OF HUMANISM
By Tzvetan Todorov; translated from the French by Carol Cosman.
Princeton University Press. $29.95.

Reviewed by CAROL E. QUILLEN

Humanism is a vague term. Variously qualified, it can mean many different things: the revival of ancient Greek and Latin literature (Renaissance humanism); an ethic focused on life in this world (secular humanism); an antimaterialist aesthetic (new humanism); and welfare-state capitalism (liberal humanism). Over the past forty years, it has also become a highly charged term, though its meaning is no clearer, as self-identified antihumanist scholars have used it to denote those aspects of the European philosophical tradition that they explicitly reject.

This theoretical debate between people called "humanists" and people called "antihumanists" has emerged, sometimes under different labels, in a range of academic fields, including philosophy, literary studies, feminist theory, and history. Although the debate takes up many related issues, it is fundamentally a disagreement over what it means to be human. At the risk of some distortion, we might provisionally say that humanism assumes a human being who can be described in the abstract, independently of time and place, and who is endowed by nature with certain attributes like the capacity for self-knowledge and the ability to make free, rational choices. From this perspective, modern humanism carries on the legacy of the Enlightenment: humans are naturally free, equal, self-aware, and gifted with reason. The more

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they exercise their reason, the more they know, and the better able they are to master their environment and control their destiny. Ignorance and superstition are the enemies of humankind. As knowledge and technological innovation spread to more people and more societies, so will freedom. These views remain very powerful today and indeed sustain much political and ethical thinking in the West.

Antihumanism, on the other hand, defines human beings not as given essences but as subjects who get created in different forms in particular historical times and places. There is no such thing as "Man." Further, humans are constituted not by nature but by ideological, material, interpersonal, and discursive structures that operate through them, such that their freedom and self-awareness are severely constrained. Theorists who adopt this view of the human person inherit (from, for example, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) a progressive tradition that points to the limitations of Enlightenment thinking. If men are born free and equal, then why, Marx asked, are so many workers starving and unfree? Where, Nietzsche asked, do these moral ideas that we claim are products of a universal reason really come from, and who is served by them? If people are self-aware and can act rationally, Freud asked, then why are they sometimes so blind to their own motives? More recently, the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault has provided antihumanists with views of the human subject that question still-dominant Enlightenment assumptions with the aim of understanding the persistence of oppression.

The debate between humanism and antihumanism forms an important context for the reception of Tzvetan Todorov's newly translated *The Imperfect Garden*. However, Todorov does not operate within the usual bounds of this familiar debate. Born in Sofia, Bulgaria, he moved to Paris in the 1960s and quickly earned fame both as a versatile, creative scholar and as a gifted writer. Now director of research at the Centre National de la Récherche Scientifique, he has written numerous books that span a daunting range of disciplines and topics, from literary theory to politics to intellectual history.

What unites Todorov's impressive and diverse scholarship is not a method or a field but rather an abiding, profoundly ethical question: how can we understand the relationship of each human self to other human selves? What do we need from, and owe to, each other? This is in some sense a question about what it means to be human, and from this perspective *The Imperfect Garden*, like Todorov's other work, speaks to the current debate between humanists and antihumanists. However, by reframing the inquiry—by asking what we need from and owe each other rather than what it means to be human—Todorov attempts to transcend the familiar dichotomy between humanists and antihumanists. That is, he offers an interpretation of the humanist legacy that incorporates many of the insights of what is usually read as antihumanist critique.

Because his perspective in *The Imperfect Garden* is so original, it is important to note from the outset the conception of humanism that is at work in it. For Todorov, humanism represents an intellectual response to the implications of human freedom. This style of response finds its initial expression in the writings of selected French thinkers from Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) to Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) to Benjamin Constant (1767–1830). Todorov very deliberately reads these writers not to recover what their words might have meant for their contemporaries, but for what they have to say to us in the present. That is, *The Imperfect Garden* is less a reconstruction of the thought of past important writers than it is the construction of a model of humanist thought that can both illuminate the past and inform the present. It is, in Todorov's words, not history but a dialogue with history, undertaken to equip his contemporaries with the judgment to live ethically in the twenty-first century.

Imagine, Todorov asks his readers, that sometime in the fifteenth century, Satan made a bargain with humankind. "Modern Man would have the possibility of living freely, of acquiring mastery of his own will and living

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his life as he wished." Yet Satan cleverly hid from human beings their end of the deal, the costs of freedom. Only later, after they had embraced the power of the will, did he reveal what they would have to give up. The price of freedom, as Satan's dark prophets have made clear since the eighteenth century, is alienation: alienation from God and indeed from any transcendent source of truth or values; alienation from others, whose needs and desires compromise individual freedom; and alienation from self, as each discovers the limits of and contradictions within his or her own power to will.

In the face of these claims about freedom's heavy price, human beings, Todorov writes, responded primarily in four ways: as conservatives, as scientists, as individualists, and as humanists. Todorov calls these different styles of response "thought families." Conservatives took the dark prophets at their word. Freedom, they decided, does rob us of God, community, and self, and the price is too high. Conservatives therefore reasserted (and continue to reassert) the authority of tradition against the claims of the will. Scientists rejected the idea that humans could ever be truly free, because the only free choice available to us is the choice we make to know, and the knowledge we discover, though a powerful tool for mastering nature, shows us how we are determined by physical, biological, and historical laws. Individualists, like conservatives, agreed with Satan's prophets that freedom demanded the loss of God, community, and self. Yet, unlike conservatives, they understood this loss as a further emancipation. Where conservatives mourned, individualists shouted with joy. It is the final response to the implication of human freedom, that of the humanists, that most interests Todorov and forms the subject of this book. Among those with humanist leanings (some are more firmly in the family than others), Todorov particularly focuses on (in addition to Montaigne, Rousseau, and Constant) René Descartes, Charles de Montesquieu, and Alexis de Tocqueville.

From Todorov's perspective, humanism is a way of thinking that is founded on three basic ideas: "the autonomy of the I, the finality of the you, and the universality of the they." That is, humanism first values individual autonomy. Second, it treats other persons both as irreducible, as different from and more valuable than any abstract definition of "human," and as ends in themselves (not as tools to be used for the fulfillment of our own aims). Finally, it recognizes a common bond among, and a sense of obligation to, all persons.

Clearly these ideas—which together imagine a self who is both autonomous and necessarily obligated to others, a self who acknowledges both the universal value of an abstract humanness and the unique value of each concrete human—are in some tension. Indeed, in Todorov's account, the complexity of humanism's overlapping values makes it vulnerable to oversimplification: conservatives, scientists, and individualists all tend to reduce humanism to a single dimension so that they can more easily dismiss it. Partly for this reason, Todorov's chapters analyze not only the components of humanism but also their interplay. How do individual thinkers balance autonomy with interdependence, freedom with love, solitude with sociability? What happens when a thinker ignores one of humanism's three central ideas? How do the possibilities that we see in their writings speak to challenges these writers could not have imagined but that we now routinely face?

Todorov provides an engaging, eloquent encounter with aspects of the thought not only of Montaigne, Rousseau, and Constant but of other important French writers as well. Yet this is not his central aim. Nor does he intend to offer a history of French humanism from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, for the book is far too selective for that. Rather, he uses isolated elements from the writings of past humanist authors to construct a new kind of humanism, one that differs from any professed in the past. Even his threefold definition incorporates many insights from contemporary "antihumanist" critique, by stressing not only the familiar themes of autonomy, self-reflection, reason, and free will, but also something unexpected: the absolute centrality of others to the formation of each human self. To the conven-

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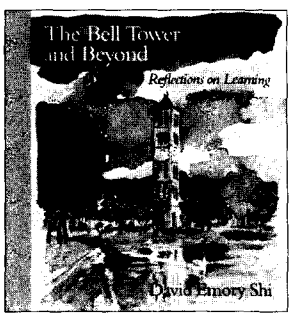
tional understanding of "Modern Man" as a freestanding individual endowed with certain noble attributes, Todorov juxtaposes another, social side of humanness, one that finds its most telling expression in the infant seeking the recognition of the mother's gaze. Yes, Todorov writes, we are individuals, but—and here his debt to thinkers who are not specifically humanist is clear—we are individuals who from the very beginning depend on and delight in each other. In balancing our needs for autonomy and connection, we find our full humanity.

Todorov's approach to texts from the past is not that of a modern historian. Rather, his writing recalls that of his Renaissance humanist forebears, men who struggled not only to recover the literature of antiquity but also to make that literature meaningful to their contemporaries. How, Todorov asks, can thinkers from centuries ago speak to our concerns? In addressing this difficult, urgent, and quintessentially humanist question, Todorov's *The Imperfect Garden* exemplifies the rich legacy it so eloquently describes.



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Reviewed by ELAINE BLAIR

Astolphe de Custine, a forty-nine-year-old French aristocrat, mediocre novelist, and patron and host of Parisian literary salons, had made no special study of Russia before he spent two and a half months there in 1839. But the book he wrote about his travels, *La Russie en 1839,* was enormously popular when it was first published in 1843. Moreover, after the Russian Revolution Custine was celebrated in the West for his strangely prescient descriptions of the country under absolute rule—he noted cultural currents that would prevail in Communist life, and also explicitly predicted a cataclysmic revolution. In the 1940s, American diplomats in Russia were delighted by the book's descriptions of elaborate official charades and mealymouthed flatterers. Three editions of the travelogue have been published in the United States since 1951. That includes this latest version, *Letters from Russia* (the original anonymous translation of 1843, edited by Custine's recent biographer, Anka Muhlstein), which is the first to come out since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

If it was once tempting to read the book as a field guide to Soviet hypocrisies, today it's impossible to reduce it to a story about Russia, past or present. Its true subject is *Custine* in Russia: Custine the monarchist, the avowed homosexual, the devoted Catholic, the critic of vapid Restoration society. He spent most of his trip among the courtiers of St. Petersburg, though he also explored Moscow and briefly visited the cities of Yaroslavl and Nizhny Novgorod. His book is a rambling, epistolary

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travelogue—a collection of observations of the landscape, the architecture, the manners of the court, the clothing of peasants, the mien of coachmen and innkeepers and serfs—that always returns to the way in which despotism and corruption have marred every aspect of Russian life.

The book's pensive mood is underscored by Custine's steady, almost comical rumble of disapproval about the foul accommodations, reckless driving, and other indignities that he endures in the course of his travels. In themselves, these indignities hardly account for his dark view of the country. He was, after all, warmly received by the tsar, and shown only a well-scrubbed official Russia. Instead, his attitude seems to arise from some private transformation—one that he himself suggests is at the heart of the book: "I went to Russia to seek for arguments against representative government," he famously writes in his introduction. "I return a partisan of constitutions."

Like Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* preceded *La Russie* by eight years, Custine came from an old family devastated by the French Revolution; both of his parents were imprisoned during the Terror, and his father and grandfather were executed. Like Tocqueville also, he began his trip a reluctant legitimist, if only because he believed it was the aristocracy alone that had the natural ability to govern. Though he acknowledged the abuses of the old regimes, he hoped to find much to praise in a society untouched by the revolutionary juggernaut.

What he found instead was a populace stifled by tyrannical autocracy. Custine's unforgettable first impression of St. Petersburg is of a city quiet and largely deserted, the only people in sight those briskly going about official business—the business of conveying and enforcing the tsar's dictates. "Now appears a cavalry officer passing at full gallop to bear *an order* to some commanding officer; now a *Feldjäger,* carrying *an order* to some provincial governor, perhaps at the other extremity of the empire. . . . Next are seen foot soldiers returning from exercise to their quarters, *to receive orders* from their captain" (italics in the original).

In 1839, Russian civil society was still orga-

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nized according to the *chinn,* a military-style ranking system controlled by the tsar. Such a system, Custine felt, fostered a spirit of submissiveness and lent an air of desolation to St. Petersburg's street life. Worst of all, to his mind, there was no hereditary aristocracy, and Russian noblemen were entirely beholden to the tsar for their status; this bred a sycophancy and venal ambition among the courtiers that appalled him, and that, he argued, dried up social discourse and intellectual life.

That St. Petersburg society had the outward appearance of Western, especially French, old regime society (the same fashions, the same social amusements, the same language, all against a backdrop of Western architecture) without possessing an independent nobility or any of the other social classes that had evolved organically in Western Europe, struck Custine as an intolerable charade—one that reflected a deeper deception about the true nature of the brutal autocracy. This deception was carried out by the government, but it was also spread by people of all levels of society. It was partly for the benefit of foreigners, and partly for the benefit of the tsar himself ("everyone masks the evil, and obtrudes the good before the eyes of his Imperial master. There is a permanent conspiracy of smiles. . . ."), but it ran deeper, too—in Custine's Russia, everyone is always simultaneously lying and being deceived: "the Russians of all classes conspire, with a unanimity which is extraordinary, in causing duplicity to triumph among themselves."

Custine is no dispassionate observer of this culture; a current of anxiety runs through much of the book. The sensitive traveler is, of course, a familiar figure in romantic literature, but Custine's discomfort seems to exceed the boundaries of aesthetic convention—he was, in fact, mocked by reviewers for his nervous flights of fancy. Near the beginning of his trip, he visited the fortress of St. Petersburg, where state criminals were incarcerated. He writes that while he wandered the grounds, "a thrill of horror passed through me as I thought that the most steadfast fidelity, the most scrupulous probity, could secure no man from the subterranean prisons of the citadel of Petersburg, and my heart dilated, and my respiration came more freely."

It's this sympathetic terror that makes him unusually perceptive: he seems to register the capriciousness of the tsar's rule on some profound emotional level, to feel for himself the helplessness of the Russians. But it's also his fear, narcissistic at heart, that makes him unreliable. An uncontrolled terror overruns some of his observations: describing the faces of village youths, he writes that "their eyes . . . have that unquiet and furtive glance natural to the Slavs, who can in general look sideways, and even behind, without turning their heads." He can be absurdly dyspeptic ("even the mazurkas at Petersburg are less lively and graceful than the real dances of Warsaw"), and above all, dismissive: the Russians "have no creative genius," he emphasizes several times.

In spite of its initial commercial success, the book fell into obscurity in the second half of the nineteenth century and stayed there until after the Russian Revolution. It's not hard to guess why: Custine utterly failed to account for the transformation that would sweep Russia within twenty-five years of his visit. Circulating among the gentry and escorted by an official guide, he does not seem to have registered—and perhaps was not welcome in—the circles of the liberals and intellectuals who would soon bring about vast legal and judicial reforms as well as an artistic renaissance.

Today *La Russie* is interesting to us not simply as a work of historical observation and prognostication, nor as a document of neurosis, but as an unusually sensitive register of political degradation. If Custine's antipathy toward the Russians seems indiscriminate and distorted, it's partly because he divined that the powerful and the powerless were together corrupted by arbitrary cruelty and its cynical denial. But Custine is finally too attached to this single impression to make the leap to a sympathetic understanding of the Russians. Wary to the last, he acknowledges as much. "I do not always flatter myself with having discerned the truth, but I have discerned that it was concealed from me, and it is always something to know that we are deceived; if not enlightened, we are then at least armed."

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THE READER REPLIES

THE MOURNING PAPER

"The Mourning Paper" ("At Large and At Small," Spring 2002) airs some of my own grievances, though Thomas Mallon's disappointment with *The New York Times*'s "Portraits of Grief" lies less in their lack of restraint than in their outright deceptiveness. I certainly agree with him: so much of daily life as conceived by the media, the advertising world, the political establishment, etc., consists of manipulating the facts to one's personal or organizational advantage that one begins to hope that in death, at least, one may count on the truth. But I can just as easily imagine the *Times* editors reminding us that they wrote down merely what they were told by family, and who is going to bad-mouth the dead, even if they were tyrants at home or maxed out their credit cards? No wonder forgiveness and euphemism are invoked when someone dies: we see that generosity as the poor soul's only compensation for the intractable finality of death.

Thank you so much for producing a publication that inspires such cognitive dissonance.

BORIS FISHMAN
New York City

BROWN

I wasn't sure if I wanted to renew my subscription, but Richard Rodriguez's "Brown" made the decision for me. I cannot describe the impact of this essay. More, please. More from this brilliant writer who has no allegiance to race, creed, sex, or bookstore categorization. It rocked this white woman's world.

SUSIE WATSON
Ellison Bay, Wisconsin

BEARING ARMS

Tim Morris's "Bearing Arms" may be the freshest and most *frisson*-inducing essay I have ever read in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Morris skewers all nutty-partisan ideas about citizens arming themselves without stooping to caricature.

His depiction of the State of Texas (and the state of Texas) rings true. As a recent transplant to Houston, I have seen drive-through gun sellers, boldly displayed pawnshop gun sellers, and department stores briskly selling guns in closeout merchandise sales. One of my first social invitations was from a group of button-down aerospace engineers to a handgun shooting range on a Sunday afternoon. I wish that, like Morris, I had perfect pitch for depicting situations with such rational brilliance.

MARK SWAIM
Houston, Texas

Professor Morris, even as he notes the existence of only four states where a right to bear arms is "unenumerated in the state constitution," sets us up by attempting to paint a picture of the "gun culture" with reports of his Nancy Drew adventures at only two gun shows and two gun shops. If *ad hominem* attacks are to be the case presented, ought not a few more *hominis* be examined? Those constitutional "enumerations" were created by referenda indicative of a broad spectrum of people supporting gun ownership.

Although they are commonly found everywhere when the issue of gun ownership is raised, unsound, emotive arguments and childish mockery do not belong in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

FRANK WINKEL
Verona, Wisconsin

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THE TRAMP OF A FLY'S FOOTSTEP

This reader must reply to Professor John M. Picker's claim of the preëminent role of Victorian physicians in the introduction and extensive application of auscultation. French and American physicians, not the English, should be given the credit.

While Victorians may have lived in "an age of 'auscultation'"—concisely defined as the act of listening—their doctors were not "the first to treat their patients with sophisticated methods of auscultation." Patients cannot really be *treated* by methods of examination alone, unless the laying on of hands and stethoscopes be considered psychotherapeutic. In any event, the practice of stethoscopy actually began after Laënnec invented the monaural instrument in 1816, not 1819. (His classical description of its application, *Traité de l'auscultation médiate*, did appear in 1819.) By the time Victoria became Queen of England in 1827, French medicine in Paris had surpassed that in London and Edinburgh, and was attracting young American medical students seeking the best available educational opportunities.

The Paris school is probably best personified in Pierre Charles Alexander Louis, who published his defining work on gastro-intestinal disease in 1829. Eight years later, his pupil, the Philadelphian W. W. Gerhard, distinguished typhoid and typhus. In 1825 Louis had published his pioneering research on *phthisie* (tuberculosis); the next year saw the second edition of Laënnec's classic, containing more extended observations of cardiopulmonary disease, little improved on by later students. The English may not have been literary laggards, but they did drag their medical feet.

Two young Americans, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, studied under Louis and his colleagues between 1832 and 1835—when the Victorian age was very young—and returned home to introduce French methods of examining patients. Bowditch was the first specialist in pulmonary disease in the United States. His *Young Stethoscopist*, a pioneering text, was published in 1846. In 1852, the American George P. Camman produced the binaural stethoscope, variations of which are in common use today.

JOHN H. FELTS, M.D.
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

ELECTROSHOCK THERAPY

I was troubled by the appearance in the same issue of psychiatrist Susan Mahler's vivid description of how her own mental problems affect her day-to-day life ("Inferno") and Sherwin B. Nuland's description in "The Uncertain Art" ("Lightning on My Mind") of what electroshock offers severely depressed people. To me, as a nonprofessional (though one who has had some contact with problems of mental illness), it seems clear that Dr. Mahler suffers from some form of severe depression. The question naturally arises why she doesn't call Dr. Nuland, or vice versa. I'm afraid the reason is that Dr. Nuland is overstating his case.

I've seen electroshock in action, and it isn't pretty. In the case with which I'm most familiar, it provided no help, and the aftereffect, primarily disorientation, lasted up to a couple of days. The actual electroshock process seemed cruel and almost inhuman. The same could probably be said of an operation, but somehow this seemed worse.

I have very personal reasons for wanting to see real progress in the treatment of depression. However, the Nuland piece has the overtone of a pop "We've found a cure" approach that can lead to frustration and heartbreak in those who need help the most.

ARTHUR L. BERGER
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Susan Mahler replies: Both Dr. Nuland and Mr. Berger offer perspectives on electroconvulsive therapy, or ECT, that are heartfelt and enlightening. For Dr. Nuland, whose medical school remembrances include convulsions, foaming at the mouth, and leather restraints, the modality in its modern incarnation must indeed seem an altogether new and miraculous treatment. Mr. Berger, meanwhile, expresses his dismay that the effective-

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ness of the procedure has been exaggerated, its side effects minimized.

The truth about ECT, as it is currently practiced, falls somewhere between these two poles. Clearly there have been enormous technical advances in the last half-century, rendering the procedure vastly safer and more tolerable. The use of muscle paralytics has eliminated the dangerous and gruesome whole-body convulsions; short-acting anaesthetic agents have, as Dr. Nuland indicated, significantly reduced the degree of post-procedure confusion and memory loss.

Nonetheless, ECT is not a "modern miracle," nor is it a benign procedure. Dr. Nuland suggests that memory loss is brief and transient; in fact, memory is often affected for weeks or even months following ECT. Most patients are not permitted to work or drive for the duration—several weeks—of ECT treatment, because of the risk of confusion, disorientation, and subtler cognitive deficits.

In fact, the range of cognitive effects attributable to ECT is almost certainly wider than most psychiatrists acknowledge. Patients report difficulty with attention and concentration, word-finding, spatial orientation, the ability to structure and retain information. They also report a sense of unreality in their daily lives. There may be severe mood swings, from elation to profound sorrow.

The efficacy of ECT, particularly for depression and mania, is reported to exceed that of medication. For Major Depression, at least 50 percent and perhaps as many as 70 percent of people who do not improve on medication will be helped by ECT. These are impressive statistics. Still, not everyone responds. And of those who do recover, a significant number will, as Mr. Berger suggests, suffer a relapse. "Maintenance ECT," consisting of a single treatment about once a month, is an option for some patients.

Despite our scientific advances, we still have little understanding of how ECT works—when it does. As Dr. Nuland says, "No one has yet been able to figure out the precise mechanism by which this peculiar form of therapy does its astonishing work." Perhaps when we have a better grasp of ECT's mechanism of action, we will be better able to minimize its negative aspects, and optimize the duration of its effectiveness.

Sherwin B. Nuland adds: It is hard to know how best to reply to a correspondent who claims to have seen electroshock therapy that was "cruel and inhuman." My own experience as an observer has been quite the opposite, as has that of the psychiatrists to whom I have spoken, who administer it on a daily basis with results like those I report in my essay.

If Dr. Mahler is correct in stating that the truth "falls somewhere between these two poles," I would submit that it is so close to mine as to be touching it. Herewith a few sentences from the March 14, 2001, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, in an editorial titled "Electroconvulsive Therapy: Time to Bring It out of the Closet":

> An effective and safe treatment for major depressions, ECT has had response rates reported in the range of 80–90 percent as a first-line treatment, and in the range of 50–60 percent for patients who have not responded to one or more trials of treatment with antidepressant drugs.

And then, near the end of the editorial:

> The results of ECT in treating severe depression are among the most positive treatment effects in all of medicine. Yet this effective treatment too often remains in the shadows of stigma and fear.

For those of us who have witnessed the horrors of ECT as originally practiced, and then have lived through the long period when it was denigrated as abusive and dangerous, the current situation is, Dr. Mahler's opinion to the contrary, "truly a modern miracle."

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The Podium

The Forbidden Slippers

JEAN GALARD

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw some inspired attempts, particularly in Vienna, to endow everyday life with uninterrupted artistic quality. For instance, in the art-nouveau interiors of the Villa Friedmann, designed by the architect Josef Maria Olbrich in 1888, the dream of integrating the decorative arts with practical use was very nearly realized. The most interesting comment on this movement was a tale called "The Story of a Poor Rich Man," written by the architect Adolf Loos in 1900. In it, a wealthy man calls on a famous architect, telling him, "Bring art into my home, regardless of the expense."

The architect hastens to renovate the apartment of his client. The colors of each room are carefully calculated. Each object has a rigorously determined place. The doorbells chime in tune to musical themes from Wagner and Beethoven. The client is initially thrilled: whether turning a knob, reclining in an armchair, or treading on a rug, he is living in Art. One day, the architect visits the master of the house and chides him for wearing inappropriate slippers. The host reminds his visitor that the embroidered slippers were custom-made according to the architect's own design.

"I know that!" thunders the architect. "But they are for the *bedroom*."

The client soon commits new blunders by accepting gifts. "You no longer need anything," the architect sternly tells the poor rich man. "You are complete."

Does Adolf Loos's tale plead against artistic intention? Certainly not. Loos was one of the great artists of his time. It is, rather, a critique of ornamental tyranny. When life is sacrificed to art, a painful expulsion results: that of the poor man, whether wealthy or not, who is reduced to being a mere spectator of his own clotted and shriveled life.

—from "Total Works of Art," a lecture delivered at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, May 28, 2002

Jean Galard is the director of cultural services at the Louvre Museum in Paris.

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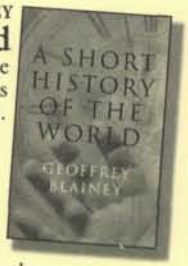

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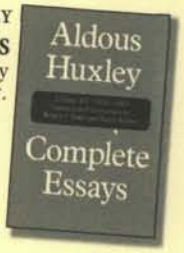

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